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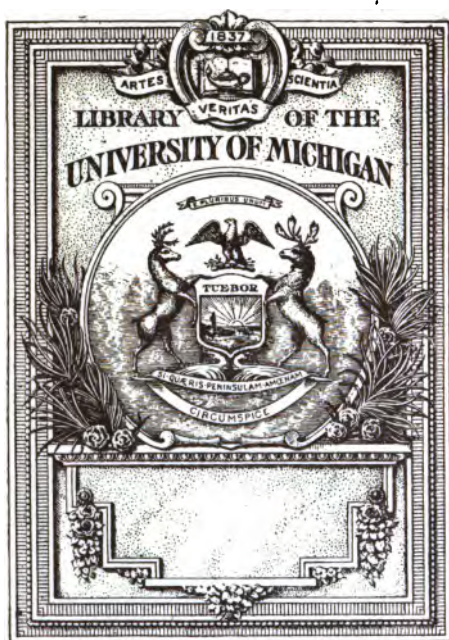
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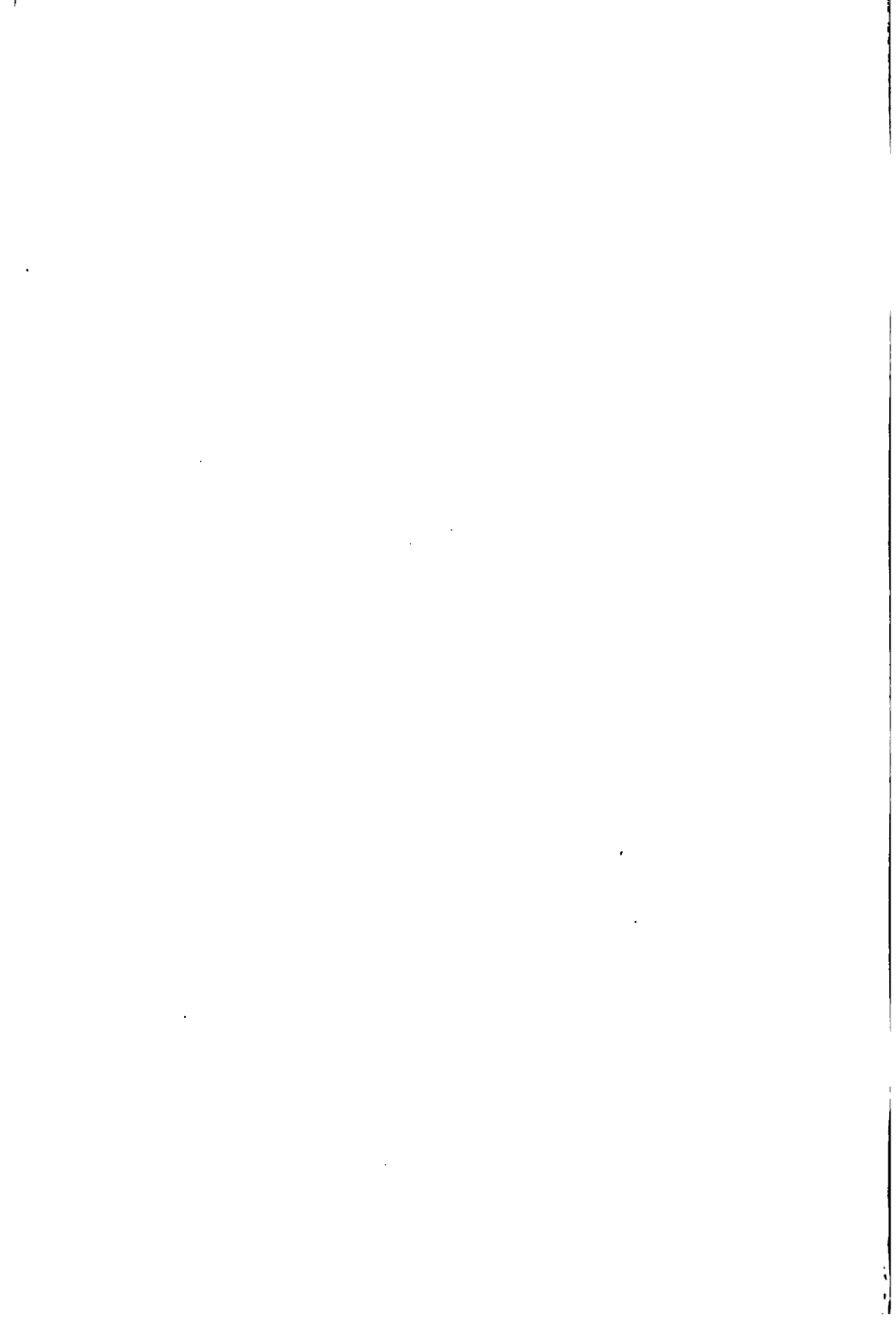
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FEDERALISM AND HOME RULE



FEDERALISM AND HOME RULE

BY "PACIFICUS"

"Dangers are no more light, if they once seeme light: and more dangers have deceived men than forced them."—BACON.

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TO
YOUNG MEN WHO SEE VISIONS

THE spirit of Liberalism is the love of freedom, of Socialism protection of the weak, of Unionism union.

Each of us chooses his part, freely as he thinks, and according to what appear to him to be the needs of the time. But in fact each of us is bound by some tradition which limits or directs his choice. And this is altogether as it should be, for otherwise the fabric of society would not hold together.

My choice was made long ago for union, as the need of my country which seemed to be most urgent. The union of the United Kingdom is a great thing, and to impair that would be to lose all. But with the progress of years the meaning of Unionism has grown and widened beyond what it was at first.

The Unionist party came into being to withstand the disruption of the United Kingdom which was at that time threatened, and which is still threatened. Unionism stands by its original purpose, but it has assumed a new task—to bring about the union of the Empire, a thing which is still to make. And the policy of Unionism covers yet another field which is sometimes overlooked and forgotten, at any rate by our opponents. The public institu-

tions of a country are its strongholds ; but without a union of *men*—of gentle and simple, of rich and poor, of class with class—there is no real strength in any nation. Unionism stands for a united people no less than for a strong Constitution.

Freedom is in no present danger. It is nowhere threatened among English-speaking men, except in so far as they are enslaved by catchwords and their own prejudices, and except as they allow themselves to be led blunderingly backwards and forwards by party organizations which profess to be their servants.

But it is otherwise with the Socialist principle. The protection of the weak, brotherliness, the duty of the stronger to help the weaker, whether the strength lie in riches, or in authority, or in knowledge, or in character, or in bodily health and vigour, is always in danger of slipping out of our sight. Human nature being what it is—not bad, but negligent and self-absorbed—we stand always in need of reminders to the fulfilment of this duty. Nor must we complain if these reminders are at times harsh and bitter, providing only that they serve their purpose, which is to awaken us.

It was not easy to remember this duty even in the old days, in the countryside, among a permanent people whose faces were familiar. It is harder to-day in our cities, with their millions of workers, ebbing and flowing, and where no large employer of labour knows, or can know, a tithe of his workpeople even by sight. It is never easy.

But while the Socialist has decided that the only way of keeping our duty to our fellow-men clearly before us is by waging a war of class against class, the Unionist believes it to be possible by making peace between class and class. What the well-to-do citizen will gladly give

for the public good knows hardly any bounds but his own ruin, providing the demands upon him are made to appear as an honour conferred upon him and a duty of citizenship. This was the method of Chatham and Pitt, to whom men gave gladly, and would gladly have given even more than was asked of them, and who were worshipped by those very classes upon whom their exactions pressed most heavily.

There has been of late a lamentable departure from this precedent. Taxes have been laid upon us and made to appear as if they were judgments and penalties for our misdeeds. They have been accompanied by taunts and injuries. They have been exacted as restitution. A kind of blackmail has been demanded of us with menaces. This is not according to the traditions of English statesmanship, and it is deeply resented. The spirit of Unionism is utterly opposed to it.

Union, the love of freedom, and the protection of the weak, are not opposing ideas. It is only the methods by which they are sought which are in opposition. At ordinary times it is a good thing rather than a bad that we should look at all affairs from our different standpoints, that we should view them in a different perspective, and that we should be Liberals and Socialists and Unionists at war with one another. But if you go far enough below the surface there is a fundamental agreement, and in times of stress like the present, it is wise, and even necessary, to go in search of this common basis.

The present is not an ordinary time. It is a time altogether different from anything which the oldest of us can remember. The dangers both from within and from without are greater than they have ever been since the wars with Napoleon. And also the opportunities as well

as the dangers are above the common stature. It is no exaggeration to say that benefits to the State beyond any parallel are in the one scale and the ruin of the State is in the other. If we are a people worthy of those who have gone before us, we shall grasp this fact and open a new reckoning.

It is in this hope that I dedicate the pages which follow to Young Men who see Visions.

November 21, 1910

PREFACE

THE following letters, which have appeared recently in the *Times*, form a general argument if taken together ; but none of them is a complete argument in itself. Consequently, misunderstandings have arisen on the part of readers who have not considered the full statement of the case.

The three letters of an earlier date, which are printed in the Appendix, have a certain bearing upon the discussion. Their object is to insist upon the importance of removing questions of constitutional change from the ordinary routine of party politics.

The Introduction deals with the failure of the recent Conference and the position of parties at the present time, and also endeavours to remove certain misconceptions which have arisen in regard to "Federalism"—a term which, although it has come into popular use,

is not an altogether accurate description of the proposals which it is intended to cover.

The writer of these letters has no authority to speak for the Federalists. He has endeavoured to gather the views of this section of political thinkers from such of their recent writings and speeches as have appeared in print ; but it is not unlikely that he may have misunderstood their aims in various particulars. And neither has he any official connection whatsoever, direct or indirect, with the Unionist party, of which he is merely a private member, with no ambition to be otherwise. The views which he has ventured to put forward are therefore to be judged according to their own merits and demerits. No one is in any way responsible for them save the author.

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE FAILURE OF THE CONFERENCE

IN the early days of the present autumn a certain lady was asked her opinion of the Constitutional Conference. A shrewd observer of men and things, she had the further advantage of a singularly wide experience of the interplay of personal forces in political affairs. Her questioner feared that she might regard the new experiment scornfully, as a thing thoroughly unpractical and mischievous. But at the back of his mind he had a hope that she might be willing to share his own enthusiasm.

She did neither the one thing nor the other. It was a most interesting event, excellent in intention, excellent in principle; "but they have made one rather serious mistake, which may bring all its attempts at agreement to failure. The Conference is made up entirely of official people. It contains none of the rank and

file. Now, as a rule in confidential discussions official people make a very favourable show—upon the surface. Usually they can keep their tempers. They are very polite to one another, very friendly, very fair-minded. In fact, they are wholly admirable for every other purpose but the purpose in hand. The one thing that is always harder to them than any other is to *agree*. Unofficial people, on the contrary, are rather apt to raise their voices, and lose their tempers, and to be very rude to one another, and to quarrel across the table, and to turn and twist their opponents' arguments somewhat unfairly; but, in spite of all that, they are a valuable element when you want an agreement. There ought to have been a mixture of these two elements, and if the Conference comes to failure it will probably be for the reason that there isn't a mixture. The official people, remember, are always thinking, quite properly, of a great many other things besides the matter in hand. They are desperately weighed down by their party obligations. They are not free human beings, but leaders enslaved by the memory of previous pledges and pronouncements, haunted by their duty to various sections of their followers. Consistency becomes an obsession with them. The matter in hand is a minor consideration altogether in

comparison with the approval of the parties which they have the honour to lead. The unofficial people, the rank-and-filers, on the contrary, although their original prejudices and opinions are probably much stronger and cruder, are nevertheless much more independent of outside opinion. They look more at the merits of the particular argument. They are readier to yield to a reasonable influence, and to see things in a fresh light. Because their moral support cannot be depended upon like a piece of clockwork, they are in many ways a great hindrance to their official colleagues; and they are a great help to an agreement for precisely the same reason. For the official people can't hold out on grounds of consistency and pledges, if their followers in the Conference let it be clearly seen that they regard such an attitude as pedantry, and not as sound business."

At the time this opinion was not approved. Possibly it is not approved even now by the distinguished members of the Conference. But the plain man, annoyed beyond measure at the discovery that the agreement which he had hoped for has not been reached, is inclined to think that there is a good deal in the criticism.

It matters very little whether the Conference

issues a statement of its proceedings or not, for no bald statement will ever convey to our minds any true idea of the course which its deliberations pursued. For all practical purposes, we know as much now as we shall probably ever know—namely, *that it has not agreed*. The why and the wherefore of this will remain a mystery, and even if we were to be furnished with a verbatim report of its proceedings, and with gramophone and cinematograph records into the bargain, the mystery would probably remain pretty much where it is at present.

We may take it that the delegates themselves earnestly desired to come to an agreement. None but the most extreme partisan is unjust enough to assert or foolish enough to believe that there was not from beginning to end, upon both sides, a genuine and patriotic determination to arrive at a constitutional settlement, if the thing were possible. One reads with mingled feelings of disgust and contempt the suggestion that Mr. Balfour played with the Conference from the beginning, intending to break it off when it suited his purpose. And the other suggestion that the Liberals brought the Conference to an end because their party organizers reported the moment to be favourable from an electoral

point of view is equally undeserving of belief. All this is only the malice of little people.

But the fact remains that the Conference has failed to agree, that politics are in a great confusion in consequence, and that nearly everybody except Mr. Tadpole and Mr. Taper and the Quidnuncs are exceedingly annoyed. A nation is like an individual in this respect—that it must learn by experience; and if it makes experiments it must be prepared to make them again when the time comes, and with such changes in the elements as wisdom may suggest to be worth a trial.

The problem which faced the Conference was how to arrive at an agreement between opponents without a sacrifice of essential principles. This is one of the hardest problems in the world. Intellectual acuteness, common sense, honesty, courtesy, and even sympathy, are not enough in themselves unless their influence is brought to fertility by the rare quality of political imagination. South Africa was fortunate in the possession of this quality in an exceptional degree. On both sides were men very richly endowed with it, and none richer in the possession than General Botha. His wide and penetrating vision held firmly from first to last, through all the risks and jeopardy of discussions and adjournments, the

well-being of a South African nation now and for centuries to come. Acuteness and common sense are admirable for clearing the ground, but nothing will be built up on the clearing without imagination, and that passion for the fulfilment of dreams which is at once the glory and the agony of our greatest men.

It is impossible, when reticence has been so honourably maintained, to know anything for certain, but the rumour is probably not ill-founded that the Conference died of common sense ; that the dominating characters in it were sensible and acute rather than sympathetic and imaginative ; that criticism played too large, and construction too small, a part in its proceedings ; that there was a failure on both sides to grasp the fact that the powers and composition of the House of Lords is only one corner of the question of constitutional change ; and that no man was found daring enough to take his courage in both hands and put forward a plea for a wider consideration and a greater settlement.

We are given to understand that the Conference has ended, not only in failure, but in "complete failure." But, in spite of all that has happened, or that is said to have happened, there is surely room for doubt if the failure is so absolute and final as some of the news-

papers have assumed. There is to be an early election, and when that is over, shall we hear no more of conferences and attempts at agreement? And even if this be the intention of the leaders, we may be sceptical as to this verdict of "complete failure" being meekly accepted by the country, any more than the disagreement of a jury is always accepted by the judge who presides over the case.

There are optimists certainly upon both sides who profess to regard this "complete failure" with satisfaction. But their words betray them. They are not really jubilant. Under the affectation of a cheerful pugnacity it is clear that they are struggling against a strong current of patriotic regret, which threatens to sweep them off their legs.

Nothing has ever in our own time been so universally unpopular and unwished for as this failure. No recent event has called forth such clear signs of disappointment from every side. The people who think seriously about politics are disgusted because there is to be a fight over the Constitution, which they regard as needless; while the rest of the people, who, though they do not think seriously as students, feel strongly as citizens, are disgusted, because they are puzzled to understand what this great fight is to decide. Six months of truce has

been enough to dim the issues of a highly technical quarrel, and even Mr. Churchill's trenchant address to the electors of Dundee has not made the matter clear. The plain man draws his own conclusions. When eight more than ordinarily intelligent gentlemen have held twenty-one meetings, apparently with much friendliness on both sides, when they have afterwards consulted their friends, and when, after consulting their friends, they have rather shamefacedly agreed to disagree, there seems to be something farcical in such a result. There is also something intolerable in the idea that we are now to gird on our armour and engage ourselves in what the journalists encouragingly tell us is to be "one of the hottest and bitterest elections of modern times."

The journalists in such a case have doubtless the power up to a point of making their prophecies come true. But still there is room for scepticism. It is hard to find evidence of this heat and bitterness at present. Can we remember any time when political opponents meeting in the street have been more ready to stop and shake hands and talk over the day's news? Hot and bitter against whom? Against one another? No; for neither knows at present what his own party was willing to

concede, or what the opposite party was willing to accept. Where there is so much ignorance there is inevitably a great cooling down of political passions. Not improbably the approaching blasts of oratory will raise the temperature considerably, but at present it is below normal. There is annoyance, certainly—intense annoyance—but rather of the same character that is provoked by unseasonable weather. It is mainly an impersonal emotion; and when it is personal it is not so much a hatred of Liberals against Unionists, or even against the Peers, as of all men against the sublime ineptitude which has contrived to end in disagreement when what the country longed for was agreement.

We are to be driven into an election which nobody wants in order to settle something which nobody understands. If there was confusion in the month of May, there is much greater confusion in the month of November. For now we are entirely ignorant of what the Government offered and of what the Unionists were willing to take. Many Unionists might conceivably consider that the Government proposals were sufficient, and many Liberals might possibly be satisfied with the Unionists' concessions—if only they knew what they were! We seem to have accompanied Alice

into Wonderland, where the rule of life is a preposterous kind of make-believe; and we are now gravely asked to decide a serious question of constitutional change, upon the result of a game of blind-man's buff.

II. THE POSITION OF PARTIES

It has been pretty generally assumed that the coalition of Liberals, Radicals, Irish, and Labour which keeps the present Government in power is a natural coalition, or, at any rate, a less *unnatural* one than any other which could be imagined. But is this really the case? Has the bulk of the Liberal party at the present time more points of agreement and fewer of disagreement with its own "tail," not to speak of the Nationalists and Socialists, than it has with the bulk of the Unionist party?

In order to find a true answer to this question, we must look certainly at the surface of events, but also below the surface.

On the surface, exposed to every eye, is the intolerable position occupied by the Prime Minister and his colleagues. The humiliations of the present Cabinet during the early months of the present year were beyond anything

which any modern Government in England has had to endure. On a Monday Mr. Asquith may have announced that his troops will march to the north-west; but on the Tuesday Mr. Redmond has stated that the march will be to the south-east, and, being supported with enthusiasm by a number of Radical mutineers, he has compelled Mr. Asquith to reverse his previous orders. This has happened at least upon three important occasions.

These timid vacillations and changes of policy, these rapid reversals of solemnly announced and irrevocable decisions would, under ordinary circumstances, have brought any Government to the ground; but the change which came over things owing to the death of King Edward prevented this disaster by ending all show of an active policy, and silencing, for the time being, the criticism of the Opposition. So far from the national mourning being a benefit to the Unionists, it was salvation, or, at any rate, a reprieve, for the Ministry.

When a man arrives at high office, he comes at once under the influence of a powerful tradition. Whatever he may have been before—ideologue or demagogue, opportunist or fanatic—he is then forced to yield to the stronger impulse of proving himself to be a statesman and sending down his name with

credit to posterity. As soon as he is placed in authority over a department of State, he is confronted with things which have to be administered, and with Civil Servants who understand the business of administration. It requires something approaching the courage of madness to resist this double pressure—of the *men* who know and the *things* which will not budge before a few fine phrases. Consequently the new-made Minister grows rapidly to be very impatient of policies which mean ruin, and of words which mean nothing. But he has to turn many awkward corners in his regenerate career, and none more awkward than the criticisms of his former friends and allies, who, not having as yet taken the King's shilling themselves, delight in taunting him with his apostasy from his own former extravagant and impracticable demands.

Under normal conditions such attacks may be endured, like other evils which break no bones ; but in the present abnormal conditions they cannot be disregarded, because the hostile speeches mean hostile votes, and the votes they carry with them are enough to turn out the Government. That is the very essence of the present situation.

A Government which is in such a position that at any moment it "can be wagged by its

tail" (to use the vulgar and expressive phrase) is obviously a great danger to the State, but it is also a great misery to itself; and the position of affairs is an absolute bar to those new and nobler ambitions which enter into the heart of every politician when he finds himself in a position to become a statesman.

And there is another "surface" consideration which is worthy of close attention. In the spring of next year there is to be an Imperial Conference of more than ordinary importance, because of its association with the Coronation, which is to take place in the month of June. London will then be full of Ministers, and a multitude of visitors from the Dominions, most of them men more or less concerned in public affairs. And while we are very jealous, and rightly so, of any public expressions of Dominion comment upon our party discussions, we are also exceedingly susceptible to opinion from these sources when it comes to us through the medium of friendly conversations. It is more particularly our own public men—our Members of Parliament and our journalists—who will be thrown into the closest relations with our distinguished guests, and who will come most directly under their influence. The views of these visitors from the Dominions are not the views of political

opponents, but of disinterested well-wishers to the prosperity of the Mother Country. Their knowledge upon the details of our controversies is, of course, somewhat limited. They take general views; they are the friendly guests of both parties in the State. And for all these reasons their private views upon any broad question which happens to be at issue—the House of Lords, for example, or Home Rule—will certainly exercise an influence upon all parties which, from certain points of view, may be exceedingly fortunate, and which, at all events, cannot be safely disregarded by any party in the State—certainly not by either the Unionists or the Irish.

Now let Unionists put themselves for a moment at the point of view of the present Government, and consider the effect which is likely to be produced. The Liberals have been pledged for a period of just on a quarter of a century to grant something called rather vaguely by the name of Home Rule. The difficulties in the way of carrying out this scheme have hitherto been that the Irish demands were held to involve a breaking up of the Union. Now, people in the Dominions have a considerable experience both of the necessity for a firm union and of the benefits of local self-government, which is only another

name for Home Rule. And it may be assumed that any intelligent Liberal Ministry will not be so obtuse as to miss such a favourable occasion for bringing the Irish controversy to an end. If they are wise they will surely press their policy to an issue next summer, relying upon the subtle and pervading influence of our visitors, on the one hand to curb Irish demands for the impossible and the dangerous, and on the other to allay in Unionist minds the fear of a disruption.

Nor is this the only influence which this Government, if it be then in power, will have behind it. There is a general opinion, which has been growing very rapidly of late, in the Unionist party as well as elsewhere, that if extremists on both sides can be brought to heel, it is not an impossibility for the Liberal party to bring Irish discontents to an end by some new policy, free from the dangers inherent in those other schemes which have previously been advocated and rejected under the name of Home Rule. And it is also felt in many quarters that if such an attempt is to be made, there could be no more favourable opportunity for making it than the beginning of a new reign.

The foregoing considerations are obvious enough to anyone who reads his daily news-

paper; but there are others which lie rather deeper below the surface.

It has been assumed in recent discussions upon the platform and in the Press that the opposition of the political parties at the present time is more than usually acute. We are constantly told that the differences which separate serious and thoughtful men upon the two sides are fundamental, and that there is no means of composing them except by a crowning victory or a complete surrender. If this be so, it is desirable to face the issues frankly and fight them to a finish. But is it really the case?

The air has been full of proposals during the past few years that all the "moderate" men, as they are called, should come out and stand together, and form a new party of overwhelming moral weight. But this suggestion has evoked so little enthusiasm, and up to the present has produced so few results (beyond one or two leagues of various kinds, which meet annually—in the afternoon for business and in the evening for dinner), that we are forced to the conclusion that your "moderate" man must be a very rare bird indeed. Or perhaps the true explanation is that they are not "moderate" men so much as "negative" men—people who are chiefly moved by the

desire to prevent this thing or that other thing from being done. The Unionist who hates Tariff Reform and the Liberal who hates predatory Budgets are to stand together back to back and put up their umbrellas against the storm. There is not a little pathos in the picture which crosses the mind's eye; but you cannot make a strong party merely by exciting an emotion of pity for virtuous elderly gentlemen in silk hats and black coats, who are distressed because they can find no comfortable and convenient shelter from the rain. It is true that there was once a Tammany "Boss" who won a prodigious victory in the city of New York upon a single sentence which he spoke from megaphones by day and night, pasted up on hoardings, and flashed in letters of rosy light upon the clouds and the sky-scrapers: "*To h——l with reform!*"—that and nothing more! This was undoubtedly a victory for a purely negative creed; but there is a certain human heartiness about it which we miss in the columns of the *Spectator*, and which almost rises to the level of a constructive policy.

Very few of us are believers either in the possibility or the benefit of a great party got together mainly with the object of staving off change. For we need change at all times,

and now more perhaps than ever. If you are going to call a "middle" party into existence, it must consist of men who have united because they are earnestly concerned to get certain things done, who have made a compact together in order to carry out certain policies (which, though very different in many particulars, do not conflict in their essential principles) against those forces of congestion, obstruction, and delay which at present are choking and strangling England.

Between the great masses of the Liberal and the Unionist parties there is full agreement upon many matters of the highest importance. There is agreement that the present time is one of peculiar danger and difficulty. From the outside our Empire is threatened by preparations upon a vast scale, which are proceeding steadily and at a high rate of speed. From within we are threatened by social discontents which only a man naturally or intentionally blind can succeed in persuading himself are to any extent the work of ignorant and unprincipled agitators, with no foundation in actual injustice and human suffering. And there is also agreement, officially announced by the leaders of every party, that the Imperial Constitution must in some way be adapted to the needs of the time, to the growing needs of

our Empire upon the one hand and to the complexity of our national life upon the other. And much as the two great parties may disagree for the moment upon the immediate steps which it is desirable to take, both are at one that the change should be in the nature of a bold development of existing institutions, and not of a violent rupture with the past.

As to the external menace, both parties are confident that it can be withstood providing we adopt a wise policy and adhere to it; but all of us are ill at ease owing to the present situation of affairs. We are alarmed by an ominous alternation of fatuity and panic. We are not more disturbed in our minds by mischievous and impulsive proposals for disarmament than we are by the spectacle presented in the early months of 1909, when Ministers of State, rising in their places in the House of Commons, created a panic, as it seemed deliberately, with the object of overcoming the levity of their own followers. It is felt by many men in all political parties that this is not a right and sober way of carrying on the affairs of a great nation. If our navy is inadequate, or is likely to become inadequate, for Heaven's sake let us know it! Let us have the matter examined and agreed upon. Let

us lay down a policy that will cover all reasonable risks, and stand fast by it, whether a Unionist or a Liberal Government is in office. What shakes our confidence is to see a new Government coming into power and proceeding on the instant to cut down the estimates of its predecessor, alleging that it has the approval of the Board of Admiralty for so doing; and then only a few months later coming down to the House of Commons, and in sepulchral tones putting forward demands for an enormous increase in these estimates in order to recover lost ground. And with the army it is the same as with the navy. Are the Territorials a success or a failure? Are they adequate or inadequate? Is the true state of the facts being kept back from us, lest perchance a plain statement of it should provoke a revolt among those amiable theorists below the Ministerial gangway, with whom the detestation of an undefined monstrosity which they call *Militarism* and the opinion that the worst of all evils is for free men to be called upon to defend the country of which they are citizens, outweigh all the arguments of reason and common sense?

And there is also wide agreement between the various parties with regard to the dangers which threaten the State from within. Dis-

content is rife at present among the working classes in every State in Christendom. And discontent is rarely without some solid foundation in the facts of men's lives. It is the boast of this country that in the past her statesmen have succeeded in preventing the disasters of a social upheaval by a timely redress of grievances. Is there not some risk that while we are fighting a partisan battle over our constitutional amendments, we may forfeit our former title to a wise foresight? There has been recently a Poor Law Commission, and it has issued two weighty reports, differing in many things, but agreeing, at any rate, in this—that the present condition of affairs is unworthy of any civilized country. We accept this verdict without dispute, but what are we purposing to do to provide a remedy? In all probability, under our present system it will take as many years as it ought to take weeks to settle it; and meanwhile men, women, and children are dying quite unnecessarily, and becoming more and more degraded, while interminable eloquence is being poured forth about their sad plight. Both sides without a doubt are sincerely anxious to find a cure for the evils described; but both, under our existing arrangement of parties and with the aid of our admirable parliamentary procedure, will

for some years to come be engaged chiefly in proving that whatever remedies may be put forward by their opponents are quite inadequate to meet the needs of the case. Only a man whose thoughts are pure vanity can really imagine that if you were to sweep away the House of Lords to-morrow there would be any serious improvement in this particular.

But the question of the Poor Laws is only one of many social questions which are crying out for settlement. It is needless to multiply instances. To make provision for old age and ill-health, to introduce measures for diminishing the evils of unemployment, and for enforcing obedience to the laws of health, are subjects which certainly demand the prompt attention of our legislators. The same problems are facing us again to-day which the author of "Sybil" and "Coningsby" saw clearly with his piercing and sympathetic vision. If we are to deal with the idle rich, we have also to deal with the idle poor. The want of education is, perhaps, at the root of many of these evils; but what is needed is not only education in the Board-school sense of the term, but education in a wider and more practical meaning. If the State is to be made secure, the people will have to be taught not only how to earn their living, but how to live.

The urgency of these matters is freely admitted upon both sides. National Defence and Social Reform figure upon the banners of both parties. By the earnest co-operation of sane men upon both sides much might be done, but without such co-operation the delay may easily prove fatal. For time is running fast against us ; and this precious commodity we are wasting with both hands in futile debates and in a wearisome succession of General Elections, conducted in a whirl of extravagance and mendacity. The results of these elections, as is natural from the manner in which they are undertaken, leave the verdict always in dispute.

It has also ceased to be a matter of difference between the two great parties that considerable constitutional changes have become necessary. The powers and composition of the Second Chamber are in the forefront, but there are other problems behind of at least an equal importance. The question of the House of Lords is only a part of a much wider question. The need for efficient and dignified local self-government comes next in order of discussion. And neither of these is inferior in importance to the need for some Imperial understanding with regard to such matters as effect the well-being of the Empire as a whole.

It is worth stating because it is so often overlooked that these three problems are interlocked, not merely by party considerations, but in their very nature. When you are busily considering what you are going to do with your House of Lords, it is worth while considering also what you want your House of Lords to do when you have got it. Under present conditions we need one kind of Second Chamber, but under a system of delegation of powers to local bodies, or Federal Home Rule, or whatever you may choose to call it, the best kind of Second Chamber in the Imperial Parliament may very well be of a different character from that on which Radical reformers have set their hearts—possibly something more like the present Second Chamber, possibly something altogether unlike it. We cannot tell, because no one among our active politicians seems to have been at the pains to think the matter out. Nor does the recent Conference seem to have produced any man of wide enough vision and strong enough character to force that body of statesmen to regard the problem as a whole and in its true proportions.

It is an axiom of popular government that constitutional contrivances, in order that they may be supported by a reverent tradition,

must be founded upon the consent of the people, and not merely upon a party majority of the people. Many of the results of this coming election are involved in great doubt, but two results of it are certain, unless statesmen have taken leave of their senses. Whether the victory be to the Unionists or the Liberals, the first of these results must be that very serious constitutional changes will be considered forthwith ; the second, that they will be carried through, if at all, by an agreement between all parties in the State. The precise method for reaching agreement is a detail, but agreement itself is a cardinal principle. A confidential conference between leaders, a representative convention, and discussions in Parliament, are all of them open to certain advantages and drawbacks ; but in the end there must be agreement in some way or another, and agreement must be come to quickly, for meanwhile time is running like a tide-race against us. While we are delaying other nations are actively preparing, and, what is even more dangerous, our own people are filled with a spirit of distrust and discontent.

Upon these general matters there is a great measure of agreement between the bulk of the Liberal and the Unionist parties ; but, of course, as soon as we come to consider the ways and

means of attaining them, there is at once a great show of controversy and disputation. If, however, in the presence of a grave national danger, we rid our minds of a farrago of ancient and outworn prejudices, and if we can also close our ears to those clamorous extremists upon both sides, whose function is to act as the high-priests and intermediaries of discord, is it beyond hope that we may obtain such a Government as the times stand in need of?

There are three questions which may be put without offence.

Do the Unionists fight against a name or a thing? Do they fight against Home Rule or against the break-up of the Union? And if they fight against the break-up of the Union, will they refuse to consider an arrangement merely because it bears the hated name of Home Rule, if it can be shown that, instead of endangering the Union, it will secure it?

And do the Liberals fight for a name or a thing? Is Free Trade an expedient or a principle? Is it a policy pursued in order to add to the national prosperity, or a virtue, like truth or integrity that allows of no departure from its rules? And if it is a policy merely, may it not admit reasonable concessions, with the view of attaining some greater advantage? If, without the imposition of any

protective duties or any new duties whatsoever, we can give our dominions some preference upon the existing scale of duties, and so bind them closer to us, by establishing what Washington called "the habit of trade" upon secure foundations, is there any sense in missing the opportunity?

And, finally, do the Social Reformers really believe in their hearts—those of them who have examined the problem all round—that they will ever be able to secure the full protection of the British worker against cheap labour without some measure of protection for the British industry against foreign competition?

These questions are not asked in any spirit of party or as a provocation, but most sincerely with a view to a clearer understanding of the realities of a very confused and complicated situation. If the answers are given in the same spirit by members of both parties, it is perhaps not a thing belonging only to the region of dreams and visions that there may shortly come about some startling rearrangement of the political battalions, greatly to the advantage of the peoples of these kingdoms and of the Empire.

III. FEDERALISM

There are, therefore, three considerations which appear to be of a predominant importance in this discussion :

The first of these is the present political situation, which is not merely fraught with very grave dangers, but is also entirely without any precedent to which we can turn for guidance.

The second is the advantage of building up the credit of the method of settling a certain class of our political difficulties by a business-like agreement between representatives of the opposing parties. Without some such resource to draw upon, popular government, already much weakened by the loss of its original prerogative of free discussion in the House of Commons, is in danger of forfeiting that complete confidence of the people upon which all institutions in a democracy must necessarily depend.

The third is an idea or policy which has of late and very suddenly sprung into public notice. This idea has been called Federalism, but at the present time it seems to be rather vaguely understood, both by those who favour

it and by those who oppose it. It is therefore desirable to ascertain, if we can, the general meaning which underlies this name, and to find out if there is any justice in the claim that Federalism provides a way of reconciling Irish aspirations with a firm and sovereign union.

It is also worth considering whether the further claim of these so-called Federalists, that their policy leads towards Imperial partnership or union, is well founded, or only a vague hope, resting on nothing firmer than a few rhetorical ambiguities.

No matter what may be the ultimate results of the recent Conference, it is desirable that these three cardinal matters should be kept in the public view by all the means at our disposal. And this is the only reason which justifies the republication of these letters, which from a literary point of view would have been wholly inexcusable.

The full Federalist idea, if the writer has come to a proper understanding of it, might be represented pictorially as a tree—one of those shapely and umbrageous oaks that are to be seen growing in English parks.

In Canada there is a Dominion Parliament, with a sovereignty which, to all intents and purposes, is supreme within its own sphere.

The Dominion Government, which is responsible to this Parliament at Ottawa, is in a position to speak for Canada, and the only power which can claim to influence or restrain its action in any way is the Imperial Government at Westminster.

But within the great Dominion of Canada there are a number of subordinate parliaments, each with certain powers of domestic legislation; each with an executive government responsible to it; each with its responsible Prime Minister at the head of the government. The States of Quebec and Ontario have their parliaments, and likewise the Maritime Provinces and British Columbia, and the swiftly developing regions of the North-West. But the Dominion Parliament is supreme over all.

In the Commonwealth of Australia and in the Union of South Africa there are similar institutions—similar, but not identical; for in the case of Australia the supremacy of the Central Parliament over the subordinate State parliaments is less complete than in the case of Canada; whereas in South Africa this supremacy is more complete. New Zealand and Newfoundland are unitary States.

Now, what the Federalist is anxious to set up in the United Kingdom is an arrangement

upon the Canadian model, in which there will be a supreme and sovereign Parliament, as at present, for the United Kingdom, and under it a certain number of subordinate parliaments, to attend to local and domestic legislation and administration. These subordinate parliaments are to be more or less on the model of the Parliaments of Quebec, Ontario, the Maritime Provinces, British Columbia, and the rest. No Federalist has ever suggested that Ireland should be turned into a Canada, although this accusation has occasionally been made against him by persons who have read his proposals carelessly, and have, accordingly, misunderstood their nature.

But it will be remarked at once that under the Federalist plan the supreme and sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom will be something more than the supreme and sovereign Parliament of the Dominion of Canada. It will be to the United Kingdom all that the Dominion Parliament is to Canada, and it will also be something a great deal more; for it will still be what it has always been—the supreme and sovereign Parliament of the British Empire.

The ardent and visionary Federalist would like, no doubt, to see his oak-tree growing to-morrow in its full shapeliness and symmetry.

He would like to see a truly Imperial Parliament supreme and sovereign over the whole Empire, representative of the whole Empire, and capable of speaking for the whole Empire. That would be the strong trunk of his oak. Then he would like to see the co-ordinate parliaments of the United Kingdom and the Dominions overseas—each of them sovereign and supreme within its own sphere—spreading out from this trunk their mighty limbs of varying thickness. And out of each of these huge limbs of Empire his eager vision sees growing the stout branches, healthy and vigorous, of the national, state, or provincial parliaments. Finally, there would be the councils of towns and counties: and these may be compared to the twigs.

It is a wonderful picture, and it is safe to say it will not be completed in a day, nor yet in a year and a day. Still, there is no harm, but quite the reverse, in showing it in all its fulness. And it is also rather remarkable, if we come to think of it, how much of this picture is already realized, how very many fewer omissions than we had imagined. We have the limb, with its branches and its twigs, in Canada and elsewhere. In the United Kingdom we are the trunk and a limb in one; but there are no branches—no Ontario or

England, no Quebec or Ireland, no Maritime Provinces or Scotland—only twigs! Twigs of a rural and municipal character, like the leafy growth on the stems of hedgerow elms.

This may seem to be a somewhat childish way of explaining a political idea, but as a writer is denied the use of the lecturer's black-board and pencil of chalk, he must do the best he can with his own weapons to make himself understood. It is therefore convenient, though it may not be a very elegant method of expressing the idea, to say that one of the aims of the Federalists—as they have been called—is to provide the United Kingdom with a set of branches, which it lacks at the present time.

Two attacks have been made upon this proposal for Federal Home Rule from opposite quarters. On the one hand, zealous supporters of the idea of Imperial union, or "partnership" (as Mr. Rhodes described it), complain that the beginning is being made at the wrong end. They admit that the present Imperial Parliament should be relieved of some of its functions, but they would prefer to see this process begun by a delegation of powers upwards rather than downwards. Nothing will content their soaring aspirations but an Imperial Senate

forthwith, and they are impatient at the delay which they foresee if we once begin tinkering at these problems of local self-government. To this the Federalist would reply cheerfully that he will begin where he can. If he sees an opportunity, he will try to seize it ; if there is an opening anywhere in the battle-line he will shove his troops into it. If a practical chance offers itself for delegating powers upwards, he will take it with gratitude ; but neither will he refuse to avail himself of the chance of delegating powers downwards. Both these acts of delegation are parts of one and the same idea. Both are necessary for the complete fulfilment of the Federal plan ; and in politics, as in war and in commerce, you cannot always do the thing first which is actually of the first importance. A wise and watchful man will be ever prepared to do that thing first which first offers him the chance of doing it.

The second attack comes from zealous partisans upon the other side—from those extreme and old-fashioned Radicals to whom the idea of a united Empire, organized for defence against foreign aggression, is detestable. To this small and gradually decreasing band of politicians anything which savours of Federalism, partnership, or union is viewed

with suspicion. Such persons honestly preferred Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule on the very ground that it would be a step towards disintegration and an impediment to Imperial Union ; and they show a very natural coolness towards Federal Home Rule (though they dare not openly oppose it) just because it is a step towards union.

But fortunately, as the academic and unpractical champion of Imperial Union is in a very small minority among Unionists, so is this crusted and pedantic Radical in a very small minority among the supporters of the Coalition.

It has been objected with some reason that Federalism is not a correct term to employ in our present discussion. And neither it is, if we are looking at nothing beyond the proposal for delegating some of the local and domestic functions of the Imperial Parliament at Westminster into the hands of a number of subordinate parliaments throughout the United Kingdom. That in itself is not a process which, if we are to speak with perfect precision, can be correctly called Federalism. It is something a great deal safer. It is also something which is a great deal easier to bring about. The right word is Delegation.

Federalism, in the proper sense of the term,

is the coming together of a number of States, formerly separated and sovereign, into some kind of arrangement to secure the common safety and prosperity. These various independent or quasi-independent governments agree to give up to the Federal Government a greater or a less proportion of their independence. They perform this act always grudgingly and with regret. They invariably reserve something, keep something back, which in the future is sure to prove troublesome at an inconvenient moment. No federal arrangement that we have ever heard of but contains some of these possibilities of friction.

But Federalism, even under such conditions and restrictions, is an advance. It is better than what existed before. It is an improvement, though, like all human things, it cannot claim to be perfection. It is a movement from disunion towards union, a change from the centrifugal principles of political action to the centripetal.

Our case as regards England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales is somewhat different. We have to admit that Federal Home Rule is, in strictness, a misnomer. For our ancestors took the bull by the horns. In their rough and vigorous way they gradually made of these disunited kingdoms, not a Federation, but a

single State. Wales, Scotland, and Ireland in turn have been drawn into a union which, from the political point of view, is complete. The process has occupied some ten centuries, but the sovereignty now rests wholly and absolutely in the Imperial Parliament at Westminster.

The proposal for Federal Home Rule, as I understand it, leaves the principle of sovereignty untouched. It merely proposes that various functions, which this Imperial Parliament performs not too successfully in regard to the local legislation and administration of the various countries and provinces which together make up the United Kingdom, should be delegated to a certain number of national and provincial parliaments of a subordinate character. It is contended that it will be a great advantage if our overloaded Parliament at Westminster (which now finds it necessary to sit all the year round in order to get through its work), and also an overloaded Cabinet, could pass over a portion of their local duties into the hands of people who understand the local conditions a great deal better than they are understood in London. It is hoped by this arrangement not merely to appease the Irish, or to divert their untiring dialectics against Britain into

another channel, but to secure two very considerable benefits.

The first of these anticipated benefits is that the Imperial Parliament will then be relieved of a great burden of pressing local considerations, and by this means will be left free to attend to those greater problems which concern the United Kingdom as a whole and the Empire as a whole.

The second benefit is that the local customs and traditions, the national and racial habits of life and thought, will be better understood by these subordinate parliaments, and that the measures which are desirable in the interests of each locality will be more promptly undertaken than is the case at present.

A very acute correspondent of the *Times*, who signs himself "Federal Unionist," has pointed out what is absolutely true—that such a step would not be a reversal of our former policy of union, but a development of it. He contends firmly that the Federalist aim is evolution, not revolution. Our ancestors have made this union. If you choose to call things by bad names, you can, no doubt, say that they made it by force and fraud; and all other political institutions extending over ten centuries are open to the same charge. Or, if

you take another view, you can say with equal truth that our union was made, upon the whole, with great wisdom and courage, and with amazing sacrifice and patience. But the main fact is that our union is made. It is a good thing in itself. There is no intention of injuring or impairing it. No Federalist is going to whittle away that precious possession of absolute and supreme sovereignty. He is not going to set up an arrangement open to the dangers and inconveniences of the United States of America or of the Commonwealth of Australia, in both of which there is still only a somewhat jealous and imperfect union. At all costs we are going to keep our sovereignty supreme, absolute, and intact.

The aim, therefore, of Federalism is not to break up or weaken the sovereignty of the Union, but to confirm and strengthen this sovereignty by mitigating the evils and discontents which have arisen owing to the centralization of many matters which only concern localities, and not the interests of the United Kingdom as a whole. Federalism is for giving to certain units (whether national or provincial is a matter for future consideration) the fullest possible control of their own local affairs. It is not proposed that there should be any

absolute or irrevocable disposition. The Imperial Parliament will retain its full rights, and as it gave, so it can alter or extend the powers of its subordinates. It is possible that, upon investigation, the Federalist idea may turn out to be impracticable, but the grounds on which it may be discarded will assuredly not be that it tends to impair the unity either of the United Kingdom or of the Empire.

It is admitted, therefore, that the word Federalism, as applied to the proposal to grant self-government for domestic purposes to the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, is open to objection, and has given rise to some misconceptions. But it is always difficult to change a name which has obtained a footing in public discussions. The present writer, needless to say, did not invent, and did not choose, the term Federalism. He found it in current use, and judged it wiser to put up with it than to introduce a new description, which, while it would have been more correct, would certainly have introduced an even greater amount of misunderstanding.

Moreover, although Federalism is not the best word to describe the immediate aims of the Federalists, it is a perfectly true and proper term to apply to their ultimate aims.

For in their view delegation of powers, or some form of Home Rule all round, is a natural, and perhaps a necessary, step to that Imperial partnership which is their final goal.

FEDERALISM AND HOME RULE

CHAPTER I

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

(The Times, 20th October, 1910)

IN spite of numerous suggestions to the contrary, no man really knows for certain whether things are going well or ill with the Conference. The veil has not as yet been lifted at a single corner. We are defeated by an impenetrable discretion. The inquiry whether the Conference will reach agreement or come to nothing seems, therefore, to be hardly worth pursuing; but it may nevertheless be profitable to speculate upon some of the consequences which are likely to follow from its failure or success.

For one thing at least is certain: that what-

ever happens or does not happen in regard to the discussions of this Conference, it is not a trivial phenomenon, but one that is bound to have results which must be interesting, and may be momentous. Be the end of it agreement or disagreement, things will be modified (in other than a purely party sense) by the mere fact that it has been called together and has deliberated. Whether in itself it be a development of our Constitution, as some people affirm, or an encroachment on our Constitution, which is the complaint of others, it has at any rate affected our Constitution very materially, simply by its existence.

The Conference was not called into being by the efforts of any individual or group of individuals. Like the true poet, it was born, not made. From the death of King Edward it was inevitable; and the utmost which any individual did was only to call out that he saw it to be inevitable an hour or two earlier than the rest of his fellow-men. The political instinct or sentiment, or whatever you may choose to call it, of the British and Irish people insisted upon an attempt being made at a settlement by agree-

ment between the parties, and would have destroyed any party at the polls which had stood out for fighting a General Election upon this issue during last summer. The party managers were fully aware of this popular mood, and perhaps in the back chambers of the various central offices there may even have been a professional desire that the enemy might be foolish enough to put himself in the wrong by a stiff-necked determination to give battle.

The circumstances of the case—the King's death and the existence of a more than usually grave issue between the Government and the Opposition—had produced a phenomenon quite without precedent in our political history. Various analogies have been cited—the analogy of the Irish Disestablishment in 1869 and of the Franchise Bill in 1884; but these events were of an entirely different order, and, at the most, only general arguments in favour of compromise.

If there had not been this more than usually grave issue, obviously no Conference would have been thought of, for none would have been needed; no difference, however acute, however bitter, merely with regard to legisla-

tion or policy, would have called for it. It was the gravity of the matter much more than the temper of the parties which caused things to fall out as they did; and, on the other hand, had not the King died when he did, the Conference, though it might have been thought of in studies, would probably never have come to pass. However much it was needed, it would not have been seen to be needed; for it was not the cessation of party warfare which the country demanded or desired, except in decency for a few days. It was much more that public opinion, being suddenly sobered by a great and unforeseen calamity, grasped in a flash the tremendous gravity of the question at issue. Men realized what they had not realized before—that a fundamental change in the Constitution of these kingdoms is an event of a different complexion from the making of laws and matters of administration; that what the one side had been urging and the other opposing was revolution—possibly a needful and beneficent revolution, but still a revolution for all that. It was as if two boys, who had been trundling a steel object about a hillside and fighting over it, were suddenly to become

aware that what they were handling with so little circumspection was a live shell.

This is the true account of how and why the Constitutional Conference came into being. A considerable number of partisans on both sides were much vexed. They saw obstacles suddenly thrust in between themselves and the end of a game which they had hoped to win. They clamoured accordingly, and protested, but the country remained entirely unmoved by their annoyance.

And, similarly, sentimentalists on both sides also misunderstood the situation. They talked of truces, and conciliation, and an era of good feeling, with so much eloquence it was obvious they had clean forgotten that man, whether as actor or spectator, is always an animal with strong fighting instincts.

The country was not particularly concerned about good feeling, and certainly it found the debates, if such they can be called, of June and July mighty dull reading. The country was only anxious about this one thing—that the gravest issue which had arisen within the memory of the present generation should not be submitted to a hasty, hot-headed General

Election. The country was determined that no General Election should be held, at any rate, until other means had been tried, and the heads of the politicians had had time to grow cool. The instinct of the people was assuredly right. And whether the Conference achieves a brilliant success, or fails utterly, or arrives at some conclusion or non-conclusion somewhere between these two extremes, at any rate it has earned one very signal title to our gratitude—that it has given men time to think.

But it will be a great Imperial as well as a great national misfortune if the Conference does not succeed, directly or indirectly, in settling the question it undertook to consider. If the Conference fails utterly, it will leave this very dangerous question to be fought out sooner or later between the two political camps. Our ordinary method of parliamentary debates, followed by general elections, is unsuited for dealing with constitutional problems. Ever since the Restoration we have been ruled, not ingloriously, by the King, Lords, and Commons. To get rid summarily of one of these three is a serious business, and even the

most confident Radical of them all must see a number of hard fences in his way. And Unionists also may fairly admit the gravity of the issue, and not weaken their case.

If the Coalition be beaten at the next election, which is not an improbable contingency, the matter will hardly drop out of sight so easily as on former occasions. On the contrary, the abolition, or practical abolition (for that is what it comes to), of the House of Lords is likely to become a permanent item in the Liberal programme, if for no other reason, because in its dramatic quality it is superior to most of their other party cries. It would be unwise also to underrate the force of the feeling among sincere and serious people against the House of Lords as at present constituted. Some day, if not in January next, the Liberal party will be returned to power again upon this issue. And who on either side can pretend to be certain, even about the results of an election in January next? If the Coalition were then to win, not only would the Unionist party find itself in an unpleasant enough predicament, which is a minor consideration, but the British Constitution would also be in a most

grave situation, and that is a very serious matter indeed.

But quite apart from the particular issue of the House of Lords, with all that is involved therein, it is of very great importance to build up the credit of this method of settlement by consent, after a full discussion between the leading representatives of the various parties—*behind closed doors*. An accident has brought the Conference into being, but lighter accidents have founded great institutions. It may be that this method is the natural safety-valve of popular government in the circumstances in which popular government now finds itself placed. The destruction of free speech in the House of Commons, and the growth of the power and tyranny of party organizations on the one hand—the immense increase of complexity in our public affairs upon the other—have together produced a state of things at Westminster which is infinitely dangerous. The complaint of the one side is that they cannot get their measures carried; of the other side, that their objections are often neither listened to nor even allowed to be discussed. Serious people, without distinction of

party, are becoming more and more disheartened. Is this method of conference, this expedient to which we were driven only by an accident—is it perchance going to find us a way out of the wood? If we are ever to make an attempt at Imperial union, what other way offers any hope of making a beginning save this one—of a quiet preliminary conference behind closed doors?

The method stands in excellent credit at the present time, for two reasons. The South African Union—one of the greatest things ever done—succeeded by this means, and could have succeeded by no other. And, secondly, the very fact that our present Conference has been undertaken is in itself a very remarkable achievement. It will be a political disaster of the first magnitude if the utter breakdown of the Conference should destroy so hopeful an institution in its infancy. The plain man who reads his daily newspaper is not so determined a partisan as the practical politicians are apt to imagine. He follows their proceedings with interest, admiration, amusement, or contempt, according to the ability and honesty with which they appear to perform their

various parts. But he cares less than they sometimes imagine for party victories, and is a great deal more concerned than they think about getting things done. He does not love sham tournaments, however angry the knights in pasteboard may become with one another. He does not despise fighting—far from it—but he may become impatient even of fighting if he feels that it is being pursued as an end in itself, and that nothing but more fighting will follow upon the most conspicuous victory.

CHAPTER II

SOME OTHER CONFERENCES

(The Times, 22nd October, 1910)

THE Conference in one sense may come to nothing, and yet, for all that, may come to a good deal. It may fail of arriving at any immediate agreement as to the powers and composition of the House of Lords, and still the settlement of this question, and possibly of others also, may happen at no very distant date as the result of its deliberations.

The best result of the Conference would probably be a full agreement upon the matter in hand. The worst result would be an absolute breakdown, the abandonment of the undertaking, in despair of discovering any common ground. But these alternatives do not exhaust the whole field. It is not impossible that the Conference may come, as it

were, within sight of a reasonable and practicable agreement upon the particular matter, but still break down owing to the existence of other matters which are not included in its present commission. For notoriously there are matters of this kind which not only will demand to be settled simultaneously, but, if they are not so settled, may conceivably have force enough behind them to prevent any arrangement whatsoever from being come to.

Let us look at this difficulty round and about. It would probably be admitted readily enough in the abstract by men of all parties that proposals to make changes in the Constitution stand upon a different footing from proposals to make new laws, or to alter the naval, or military, or foreign policy of the country in this way or that. An attempt, for example, to curtail or increase the powers of the House of Lords, or of the House of Commons, or the privileges of the Crown, is an entirely different thing from the passing of a law about the tenure of land, or the licensing of public-houses, or education, or housing, or taxation, or the franchise. It ought to be treated with a greater respect and

deliberation, and to be safeguarded against light and hasty decision more carefully than these other proposals of a less fundamental character. For it is one thing to alter the output of the constitutional machine ; it is another thing to alter the machine itself.

If the members of the Conference were agreed in principle that constitutional changes ought to be guarded by a Second Chamber at least as strong as the present one, though possibly of a somewhat different composition ; and if they were also agreed that matters of legislation of the ordinary sort did not require equally rigorous securities, then they are immediately faced by two considerations of not a little difficulty.

How are you to define a constitutional change so as to mark it off from ordinary legislation ? For undoubtedly there will be a borderland, and a line will have to be drawn through it somewhere, more or less arbitrarily, and with logical defects in it, we may be sure, even if Solomon and the first Earl Cairns were employed to settle it. But, hard as this task may be, it is not one which in practice is likely by itself to break down the Conference.

There is another difficulty, however. A principle may be admitted in the abstract, and yet be impracticable, owing to the existing state of the facts. The task of the Conference would be much easier if there were no other constitutional questions imminent, no constitutional changes already mooted, and crystallized into party issues, and occupying a great prominence in public discussion. We need have much less anxiety about the issue if the composition and powers of the House of Lords were the only matters of a constitutional kind which occupied men's minds at present, and if all the others were nothing but vague shapes dimly seen upon the horizon, or mere visionary, far-off projects, not yet risen even to the edge of the horizon. But while the Conference is proceeding upon its stately orbit we are obliged to allow for the influence of at least one external attraction which may produce a violent deflection and collision. To put the matter bluntly, if the question of Home Rule were out of the way, a wise and lasting settlement of the powers and composition of the Second Chamber would be a vast deal easier of attainment.

For Home Rule is certainly a constitutional matter, well within the border-line, and also risen high above the horizon. As things stand at present in the House of Commons, the party which is pledged to put Home Rule before everything else has the power, if it has the will, to turn out Mr. Asquith's Government, in the event of Home Rule not being secured, either as a part or as an immediate consequence of the constitutional settlement. And clearly the latter alternative cannot be admitted, because if the meshes of the Second Chamber are netted so wide that they will let Home Rule slip through them, can we imagine any change so large and revolutionary that it will be held back?

There are at least two historical analogies which are worth considering in our present dilemma. In the year 1786, at Annapolis, in the State of Maryland, a convention met to consider certain problems of internal navigation, of the Customs duties and the currency, and sundry other very vexing matters, about which, at that particular time, disagreement between the thirteen *united* States of America was so vivacious that some of the said States were

actually on the verge of civil war. The Convention of Annapolis, after a not unduly prolonged discussion, came to the conclusion that it was unable to adjust these pressing matters unless the wider question of union were also allowed to be considered. But this it had no warrant to undertake. Accordingly, it broke up with a recommendation that another convention should be summoned in the spring of the following year—a convention more representative in character and with a wider warrant—and that it should take into consideration all the needs of the youthful Republic. In May, 1787, this new convention met at Philadelphia behind closed doors, and did not separate until it had made the Union of the American States.

In like manner, the first step towards South African Union was a conference which met at Pretoria in May, 1908, and afterwards adjourned to Cape Town. The object of this conference was to adjust the discontents which had arisen out of the working of the railways by the various States who owned and controlled them. The conclusion arrived at by the convention at Cape Town was nearly identical, even in

terms, with the resolution upon which the delegates at Annapolis agreed to abandon their attempt. The special matters under consideration, though in their nature they were not judged to be insoluble, could not be settled satisfactorily until the wider question of closer union had been settled also. Out of this decision was born the representative convention of the South African States—a peripatetic congregation—which, after sundry meetings behind closed doors, and adjournments from one capital city to another, finally agreed, at Bloemfontein in May, 1909, to make an end of the wars and jealousies of upwards of a hundred years.

It may be admitted frankly that our own case is different from either of these. We have a Union already, and that was the very thing which these others were seeking for. We have a Union, and it may even be argued that if our own Conference were to adopt the same course of action as the preliminary conferences in America and South Africa—if it were to dissolve itself and ask for a new Conference to be called with a wider warrant—then the object of this new Conference

would be almost the exact opposite in intention from the precedents which have been cited here. It would be summoned to consider, not the making of a Union, but the loosening of the bonds of a Union already made.

But this antagonism is more apparent than real. The essence in all three cases is the same—a difficulty which it is dangerous to leave unsettled; another difficulty which must in some way or other be settled, too, otherwise settlement of any kind upon anything will be impossible. What would be the effect upon the mind of the plain man, we might ask, if the present Conference were to arrive at a conclusion somewhat to the following effect?—“We do not despair of coming to an agreement upon the question which has been submitted to us; but to reach it the whole question of the government of the country must be considered in a fresh light, more especially the relations between Great Britain and Ireland. We therefore recommend that this Conference do dissolve itself forthwith, and that a Convention of a more representative character, and with a wider warrant, be summoned early in the New Year to consider the

constitutional question as a whole." And by all means let the official pronouncement go somewhat further, if possible. Let it indicate in a summarized form the general direction in which the discussions of the Conference have tended.

If such were to be the outcome of the Conference, would the plain man be utterly discomfited? Would he consider that he had any just cause of complaint? On the contrary, he would probably judge the proposal to be of a very proper, businesslike, and reasonable character, and altogether in harmony with the beginning of a new reign.

It is not Chatham or our greatest statesmen who have ever contemned the alliance of dramatic force in their undertakings. It is wise to take the wind when it offers. The opportunity of settling the question of Ireland as well as the question of the House of Lords in the year of national rejoicing would appeal to the popular imagination as few other things would. And it would appeal, not only to the hearts of people at home, but as much, and perhaps more, to the hearts of our people in the Dominions.

For these have never understood our quarrel with Ireland nor Ireland's quarrel with us. Perhaps we have not entirely understood it ourselves, either on this side of the St. George's Channel or on the other. But if this trouble were removed, can we doubt that the course of Imperial Union would be advanced thereby? We may just as well face the fact that the obdurate antagonism of Ireland in the Imperial Parliament is taken as evidence—however unwarrantably—not of the depravity of Ireland, but that England's genius for popular government is less perfect than her panegyrists have claimed for her; that she is somewhat ill to live with; and that her advances should therefore be viewed cautiously and with a measure of distrust when she appeals for a closer union with her Dominions overseas.

CHAPTER III

OPPORTUNISM

(The Times, 24th October, 1910)

WHATEVER may be the outcome of the present peculiar situation, we may be certain it will not be any cynical proposal for "dishing the Whigs." The Unionist party cannot come forward and offer Home Rule to Ireland; for the great majority of Unionists believe, rightly or wrongly, that the present unitary state is, upon the whole, the best arrangement for all concerned. And while there may be a considerable number who have open minds with regard to the advantages of Home Rule in the abstract, none of these are oversanguine that the difficulties presented by the financial conditions, by the reasonable anxieties of Protestant Ulster and the Unionist minority throughout the rest of the island—to mention only three

difficulties among many—can possibly be dealt with on any satisfactory and equitable basis. Where, then, would be the sense, not to speak of the honesty, in precipitately adopting a policy in which most of us disbelieved?

Purely from the point of view of party interests, such a course would be as disastrous as it would be discreditable. The Unionists would be ruined with the country, for the country is rightly sceptical of the sincerity of conversions from which the convert clearly anticipates a flow of benefits to himself. They would be ruined among themselves, for they would have lost confidence in their own honour. And what advantage would there be to put into the other scale? Simply some conjectural party profit on a bargain with the Irish members in the Imperial Parliament, and with the Irish voters in the English and Scots constituencies; a treaty of unnatural alliance, for the purpose of jobbing ourselves into office; a coalition—following the fashion—a new coalition, weaker, and more exposed to insult and derision, than the present one; a combination not so much political as purely factious; an untidy bundle

of opposites, bound together with a string incapable of bearing the strain, as it might be by a child. A fine contrivance to stand the weather! An excellent foundation on which to start building up a bold policy of Imperial union!

And has anything occurred lately to change our old feeling for coalitions suddenly into love, to excite our admiration for their success, or our envy on account of the dignity, and comfort, and convenience which they bring to Ministers? Surely Unionists have not lost hopes of a victory, and surely we should not regard it as a victory if we came into power dependent upon the support of the Irish party or of any other party? We have never accepted the opinion as a sound one which assures us that the "group" system has come to stay. We rather agree with the *Westminster Gazette*, which says very wisely that Liberals and Unionists will never win victories by masquerading in one another's clothes; that when the country wants Liberalism it will take it from the Liberals, and when it wants Unionism it will take it from the Unionists. For even the poorest coalition

there must be elements which will coalesce. Such a one as has been suggested has no natural cohesion whatsoever.

The "group" system will come soon enough when British parties lose confidence in their principles to such an extent that they are afraid to let them stand alone, and begin propping them up against other principles, which they believe in their hearts to be devices of the Evil One. If we are not able to win upon our own principles, either because the mood of the country is set against them, or because our own advocacy of them is too weak and unconvincing, then it is better we should rest content with not winning. The alternative which has been offered is no victory at all, but merely a "led" Cabinet, linked together, like a gang of convicts, on a chain from one man's ankle to the next. Surely it is better to stick to our principles and win later rather than accept terms like these as the price for turning our coats.

There is, perhaps, some excuse for a protest against opportunism at the present time. Principles have not been very robust of late. Liberals have been stealing the clothes of the

Socialists, and even Unionists have occasionally been found grabbing at the clothes of the Liberals. The final and revised version of the Trade Disputes Bill was not Liberal policy, but almost its very antithesis, and payment of Members of Parliament is not Unionist policy, but a thing wholly inconsistent with it.

If the leaders of the Unionist party were to pronounce in favour of Home Rule to-morrow, a considerable portion of their followers might very possibly approve of their action as smart, while the remainder would undoubtedly condemn it as disastrous; but both sections would probably agree in the opinion that their leaders were rogues. Even supposing that the Unionist party were honestly converted to Home Rule—which is very far from being the case—even then they could not offer it, or make it a plank in their platform, or seek votes and power by the aid of it. To attempt anything of the kind would be to repeat the offence of Peel in 1847 and of Gladstone in 1886. A party which has opposed a certain policy cannot honestly or patriotically become the agency for passing that policy into law. Even if they are converted, or even if circum-

stances make the measure seem inevitable, *they* must not undertake it. It should be left to their opponents or to some other tribunal of a non-party character. To do otherwise would not merely be to destroy Unionism, but to demoralize public life, which is an even more serious evil. For the plain man does not give one atom of credence to these sudden conversions. He regards them as apostasy. In his slow and sceptical brain the swift right-about of distinguished leaders, followed in a few weeks or months by a gracious command to form a Ministry, is not viewed favourably. Conversion and martyrdom, conversion followed by a long period in the wilderness, he can believe to be a sincere thing; but not this rapid discovery that what was black before is now white, and apparently worth £5,000 a year.

But what a party may not make capital out of, and may not adopt for the sake, real or apparent, of votes and power, it may accept without demoralization or dishonour for patriotic reasons. The Unionists cannot champion Home Rule, but they might, nevertheless, submit to it without loss either of

dignity in the eyes of their fellow-countrymen or of self-respect, supposing that a representative convention, after careful inquiry and private discussion, were able to come to an agreement upon a set of practical proposals to this end. For Unionists could then honourably give up something considerable for the sake of something of even greater importance. To end many centuries of Irish discontent is not a mean aim in itself, apart from all thoughts of other benefits which may follow from it. What was impossible in the "bloody eighties" stands to-day in a different situation. A whole generation has passed away in the interval, and even if there has been no overt act of solemn purification, yet the memory has grown faint (and we may thank God for it) from lack of fresh outrages to keep it alive.

But there are, undoubtedly, other benefits to be looked for. A wide settlement of our constitutional difficulties would be a gain which the most stiff-necked Tory and the most confident Radical would agree to be an immense boon. To the Tory the Commonwealth's danger, to the Radical the

obstruction to a large variety of social remedies, are very weighty and anxious considerations. To neither is a battle royal about the Constitution a pleasing or a profitable prospect. Neither is enamoured of a violent solution in which it will be necessary to create five hundred harlot peers to vote the extinction of their own order. And there is this further inducement to both parties : that by a wise and generous settlement of these two questions—Ireland and the House of Lords—the British genius for popular government will earn an immense credit wherever the English tongue is spoken. We have done many great things in our history ; have we ever done a greater one than this would be ? And Imperial Union—by how many steps will it be advanced by this single act ?

CHAPTER IV

THE ORDEAL OF A REPRESENTATIVE CONVENTION

(The Times, 26th October, 1910)

It is important to have it understood that a representative convention called together to consider the constitutional situation as a whole must necessarily be an entirely different body from our present constitutional Conference. For one thing, it must be more numerous. For it is not enough that such a convention should represent merely the views of the two front benches. If precedents are to be our guide, it must also reflect certain broadly-marked political divisions, as well as various national and local points of view. Not only would it be necessary to include men who were entitled to speak for the Labour party, and for all the Irish parties, but also some con-

siderable admixture of the rank and file both of the Liberals and the Unionists. Owing to these cross divisions the choice would therefore be a matter of considerable difficulty; yet not so hard to arrange that there need be any feeling of despair about settling it. In such matters of picking and choosing we are a very practical people, and we may be certain that the convention, if otherwise approved, will not break down upon the question of its composition.

Nor need we fear numbers, within reasonable limits, providing only that reporters are excluded and that an honourable reticence is observed by the members. The South African precedent is valuable as showing us that these conditions are not unattainable, and are not inconsistent with the idea of popular government. It is not so much the numbers of an assembly which constitute a danger as anything in the nature of a gallery. So long as the members are addressing one another, they will not go far astray; but if, from day to day, they are making speeches, nominally to the convention, but really to their admirers out of doors, they

will infallibly fall into set postures and come to grief. In order to reach an agreement it is essential that inside the walls of the convention things should be kept in as fluid a state as possible, that prejudices should be prevented from congealing, and that the minds of the members should remain open and receptive of ideas. This is only possible, as experience has shown, *behind closed doors*.

But before accepting the invitation to a convention of this sort, the object of which is to consider the two great questions of a Second Chamber and Home Rule, there must at least be a tacit agreement that these issues are to be approached from the very beginning. Nothing shall be excluded. Nothing shall be ruled out, as already closed, judged, and done with. Unionists, Liberals, and Home Rulers must all be prepared to let their most cherished ideas run the formidable gauntlet of private and confidential discussion. And in the whole world of discussion there is no severer ordeal. The aim must be proved to be desirable. The means proposed must be shown to lead to that end. The machinery must stand the double test—that it will work

well in practice and also that it will not work injustice. It is impossible to imagine any tribunal which would be more welcome to clear-sighted men convinced of the soundness of their plea; or to pure demagoguery, which is neither rooted in the earth nor attached to the heavens, any method which would be more distasteful.

The writer of these letters has no intention of setting out any detailed scheme of Home Rule for the consideration of your readers. To attempt anything of the kind would be to invade the province of that very convention which he desires to see established. It would be absurd, and it might be mischievous, to invite people to engage in a premature discussion of details, of ways and means, of plans and machinery. How to win the assent of the Irish Unionists to any system of Home Rule; how to overcome the difficulties, the tremendous difficulties, which arise out of the Land Purchase Acts, Old Age Pensions, and the financial situation generally; how to obtain adequate securities for life and property, for personal and religious liberty—all of these are very pertinent questions; but the answers

to them are precisely what we look to the proposed convention to give us. Our present business is with considerations of a more general character.

It is of great importance to keep clearly before our minds what the convention, if it comes into existence at all, is to be asked to consider. There would be no sense in setting ourselves to do the work of this assembly in advance. We are not concerned, therefore, to discuss the merits and demerits of Home Rule, but merely to decide whether it would be a wise and patriotic act to agree to the reconsideration of Home Rule by a representative body of practical politicians sitting behind closed doors.

On the one hand, it is maintained that a great deal has changed during the last quarter of a century—the conditions, both in Ireland and Great Britain, and, in a marked degree, the tempers, methods, and aims of the popular leaders; that many things are now viewed in a new light and in a different perspective; that our knowledge has grown; and that, independently altogether of the demands of the Irish members, the need for efficient govern-

ment requires that the Imperial Parliament at Westminster should be relieved of some of its present functions. The party holding these views claims that in Home Rule a remedy would be found for many of our present difficulties, and that during the past twenty-five years the gravest objections to Home Rule have gradually disappeared.

On the other hand, however, the opinion is strongly held that Home Rule is no more a remedy for the evils which afflict us to-day, than it was for the evils which afflicted a previous generation when Mr. Gladstone announced his conversion in the autumn of 1885.

This difference of view is the practical issue which it is proposed that the convention shall consider. Its first step will be to discuss what the advocates of Home Rule mean by these words ; and when this most important and very interesting point has been made clear, the next step for the convention will be to consider whether Home Rule will provide a remedy or not.

It has been pointed out that the Unionist party will incur grave risks by submitting its case to such a convention. This may be ad-

mitted fully and frankly. There is nothing to be gained by attempting to conceal the fact. It will be a very grave risk indeed. For if the Convention, with practical unanimity or even by a substantial majority, should arrive at an agreement to recommend the country to adopt a certain plan of Home Rule, it is safe to assume that the country is likely to accept this advice. The authority of the tribunal will be so great that it will hardly be possible for the unconvinced section of the Unionists to hope, in such circumstances, to resist its finding.

But what is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander. If the Unionist, convinced of the advantages of a unitary state, takes grave risks in bringing his case before the convention, does not the same thing apply to the Home Ruler? Does not he also take great risks?

If the decision of the convention should be in a contrary sense, if it comes to the conclusion, after careful investigation, either that Home Rule is no remedy at all, or that no form of Home Rule had been submitted at its meetings which it is able conscientiously to recommend as a practicable system, what

then? Is not Home Rule in that case as dead as Queen Anne? Will the country be very anxious to go behind this decision, and to conduct a fresh investigation on its own account? Will the plain man not take the simple view that the Home Rulers have had the chance given them of proving their case, and have failed? Will there not be a general opinion, not only in Great Britain, but also in Ireland; not only in our dominions overseas, but in foreign countries, that the idea has had fair play given it, but has not made out its claim to become a part of our constitution?

An Irish leader who has any doubts about his case will not welcome the proposal for a convention; for he will have to do what he has never done before—at any rate, since Mr. Butt's time: he will have to put forward a definite scheme. It will not serve the purpose in hand to go on mumbling the old prayer for "an independent national Legislature, with an Executive responsible to the same," which has contrived to do duty on platforms and in parliamentary debates for so many decades. Hitherto the Irish leaders have thrown upon

others the burden of constructive statesmanship. They have played the part of brilliant, acute, and eloquent critics, and, up to a point, they have made an admirable parliamentary fight of it. But in this convention the position will be reversed: the chief function of the Irish will be construction, and they will have to stand, as the saying is, to be shot at. If, therefore, they go into this convention heartily, it will be stronger evidence than any we have yet had before us that they have a practical scheme to propose, and that they feel confident of being able to persuade a body of reasonable men under quiet, businesslike discussion to accept it.

CHAPTER V

THE FIELD OF THE INQUIRY

(The Times, 28th October, 1910)

LET us suppose that in the early days of next year a representative convention meets for the purpose of taking into consideration our present constitutional problems as a whole. In that case the outstanding difficulties to be dealt with will be the powers of the House of Lords and the relations between the various countries which make up the United Kingdom. It is not proposed in this letter to offer any remarks upon the first of these topics, but only upon the second (which, for the sake of brevity, we may describe as Home Rule), and these only of a very general character—more with the intention of trying to ascertain where we stand at present than with the object of offering any counsel or guidance.

As regards the Irish Question, the conven-

tion will have before it a very wide field of inquiry. To what extent have the circumstances of Great Britain and Ireland changed since the Union, since the early days of Fenianism, since the birth of Parnellism in the seventies, since the Land League's reign of terror in the eighties, since Mr. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill in 1886, since his second Home Rule Bill in 1893? And how do things actually stand with us at the close of the eventful year 1910? Are there the same evils still crying out for a cure, the same dangers to guard against, the same aspirations to satisfy all the way through, at every step of this not too fortunate history? Has everything changed in the interval of a century, or only some minor things, leaving the main problem where it was at the beginning?

In these various proposals, even in those which have been put forward by leaders who professed, and possibly had a good title to speak in the name of the Irish race, there are some very startling differences. The Fenian idea was a separate and hostile nation. Mr. Butt's idea was a National Government within an Imperial Union. Mr. Gladstone's idea was

peace—peace, as his enemies averred, at any price. His first hurried plan for attaining this desirable end was to get rid of the Irish members at Westminster. His reluctant afterthought was to have them there as little as possible, only when their presence could not possibly be avoided. It is hardly disputed to-day that Mr. Gladstone's first proposal would have lost Ireland to the Empire precisely in the same way, and by the same blunder, as the American colonies were lost a century earlier—*i.e.*, by setting up a system of taxation without representation; and that his second was probably the most ingenious artifice ever contrived by inadvertency for sowing the seeds of national ill-will and eternal bickering. But Mr. Gladstone's aim was peace, and even his bitterest opponent may admit, not only that it was a noble aim, but that he pursued it with a fiery sincerity and a most perfect courage, till physical suffering, and not the mere burden of his years—which he bore always lightly—compelled him at last to abandon the struggle.

After the passing of Mr. Gladstone Home Rule ceased to occupy public attention to

anything like the same extent. At the election of 1900 it was little heard of. At the election of 1906 it was mentioned by the Liberal party in their addresses, but only as a thing desirable in itself, and one not on any account to be attempted in practice during the term of the ensuing Parliament. Nor did the Irish party raise any loud protest against this timid pronouncement of Platonic affection. But shortly afterwards Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman let it be known that his idea of Home Rule was an Ireland as independent as Canada. Then came the Federalist idea, which is an Ireland as firmly knit up with England, Scotland, and Wales as Quebec is knit up with Ontario, the Maritime Provinces, and the West. What Mr. Parnell's idea was no historian has yet succeeded in making clear, and what Mr. Redmond's present idea may be it would indeed be rash to guess at, seeing how unfortunately he appears to have been misinterpreted in recent times by gentlemen of the Press.

In all this confusion there are certain clear differences which jump to the eye. The Fenians, and, to a great extent, the followers

of Parnell also, were out for vengeance against England. The thing which came first in their thoughts and actions was to wipe out old scores. But the motive of the Home Rule of Mr. Butt, of the Federalists, and, as we may believe, of both the present Irish parties to-day, is not vengeance to any appreciable extent, but something entirely different, more practical, and a great deal more concerned, wisely or unwisely, with the well-being of Ireland than with any injury which it is intended to inflict upon England.

We should be mistaken to attach too much importance to the old tags, worn to what Mr. Roosevelt picturesquely calls "a frazzle," to the minatory phrases, the conventional attitudes of menace, which still play their part in patriotic exhortations. No creature of the stage—no schoolboy, even—is more the slave of a conservative tradition than the orator. His audience has been accustomed to expect and to applaud certain catchwords (as some savage tribes do homage to monarchs long since dead and vanished), and the orator would be something more than human if he could bring himself to forgo the ripe cheers which await

his utterance of the hallowed sentiment. But the convention, if it should come into being, will not have to deal much with rhetoric—and this is fortunate—but mainly with real needs and desires. The touchstone in businesslike discussions is usually what people actually want. Considerations which have a heroic sound, but mean very little, do not as a rule carry much weight. Behind closed doors one may doubt if even the most impulsive Nationalist would be so misled by his emotions as to buy “a gross of green spectacles,” or the fiercest Orangeman so intent upon a party victory that he would be prepared in the same circumstances to “cut off his nose to spite his face.”

One thing will be generally admitted—that since the famous days of Mr. Gladstone a considerable change has come over the minds of men. Things are seen differently. The hopes are not altogether the same hopes as they were in the eighties and nineties, nor the fears the same fears. Whether from mere weariness or from some profounder cause, Home Rulers are become less ardent in their attack, Unionists less confident in their defence.

Although the thoughtful Home Ruler believes to-day, as he has always believed, that his proposals will succeed—at any rate, in the long run and with decent luck—in settling and pacifying Ireland, in stimulating her tillage and her trade, above all, in checking the great current of emigration from her shores, still, though he believes all this, he has lost faith in any miraculous efficacy of Home Rule. He sees clearly enough the difficulties which will have to be faced in governing Ireland after having taught Ireland for more than half a century to regard all government as the evil thing. Much, fortunately, has been forgotten upon both sides—or, at least, the memories have lost much of their bitterness for a generation which knows of them only by hearsay: the brutal murders of the “bloody eighties” on the one hand, the sufferings—appalling, and for the greater part preventable—of the “Black Famine” upon the other. These changes, for which time is mainly responsible, make the idea of holding a convention seem not only a possible, but a most natural, proceeding. We are inclined to wonder why it has never been undertaken

before. And, further, these changes encourage us in the hope that the work of the convention will not be thrown away in futile wrangling, but will issue in a successful achievement.

Then, again, behind closed doors, under the seal of confidence, may not the members of the convention expect to hear a good deal of frank and divergent discussion between the representatives of Irish opinion? And not merely between Nationalists and Ulstermen, not merely between the Redmondites and the O'Brienites, but possibly even between members of the official Irish party. The party pledge does not hold with the same force behind closed doors as in public debates. And this does not apply to the Irishmen alone, but to the Liberals, the Unionists, and the Labour men as well. It is one of the great hopes of the convention.

When men insist upon the assertion of their individual opinions, it does not necessarily preclude a sensible agreement; on the contrary, it makes for agreement. It is the party machine which makes for disagreement. Its object is not settlement, but victory. Its business is to

keep the dividing-line clear, and its men in serried ranks always upon the right side of it. But at a convention the machine is deprived of one of the chief parts of its mechanism, for it cannot bring the pressure of external agitation to bear on independent opinion. In the orations of Mr. Dillon and Mr. T. P. O'Connor there is something of a Gladstonian flavour, while in those of Mr. Redmond there is occasionally a spice of Toryism which will out. Of the opinions of the rank and file we know too little, for of all the political parties which have practised the art in late years of keeping clear of youthful merit and energy, the Nationalist party has been by far the most successful.

But there are other powers to be reckoned with in Ireland besides the distinguished gentlemen who represent Irish constituencies in the House of Commons. Does the Roman Catholic Church want Home Rule at all, and, if so, does it want Home Rule on such democratic lines as would warm the hearts of Mr. Ponsonby and Mr. Wedgwood? The Church, we are frequently told, is at the head of the whole movement—this democratic movement, as we are assured it is. But

in what sense at the head? Is the Church at the head of a marching column of soldiers, leading them on, or at the head of a restive horse, holding it back? And do these gentlemen who were once "landless," but are now become, thanks to the Purchase Acts, members of the landed class—do they still cherish any very keen interest in these high constitutional problems? Supposing they still come up loyally to vote, for the sake of old times, will that continue to be the case with their sons and grandsons? And the Irish Unionists—the country gentlemen, such of them as after a half-century of beneficent Land Acts, have succeeded in keeping out of the Bankruptcy Court, the Protestants of the South as well as the North—do these still regard Home Rule as an altogether unmixed evil? Do they perhaps foresee a not very remote future, American donations having dried up in the meanwhile, when persons of character, education, and capacity will come into their own again in Irish affairs?

Have we not heard some talk, not altogether foolish on the face of it, of a division likely to arise in any Irish Parliament between clericals

and anti-clericals?—a division which would be by no means a clean cleavage between Catholic and Protestant. And what are the real views of Protestant Ulster when men are in a quiet workaday mood and arrange their opinions without the intervention of war-cries? Protestant Ulster is a very composite society. There are landowners and industrial capitalists, and middlemen and merchants, and Episcopal and Presbyterian ministers of the Gospel, and a considerable peasantry, and a great mass of vigorous working men. Does everyone in Protestant Ulster think alike with regard to the absolute ruin which any form of Home Rule is bound to bring in its train? Above all, do they fear for their lives and liberties in the event of Home Rule coming to pass? These are interesting questions, worthy of the most careful inquiry when the convention assembles.

This conclusion, at any rate, may be fairly drawn from Nationalist speeches of late, and, if it be sound, it is very pertinent to the discussion: That Home Rule is recognized by all the Irish parties to be a very difficult thing to set a-working—so difficult, in fact, that if it were to be “wrung from Eng-

land" (as the old phrase had it)—if it were to be won by a purely party victory—it would turn out to be an utter impossibility. The one hope is a settlement by consent, as in South Africa. The goodwill of both the great parties in the State, the active opposition of neither, are conditions without which Home Rule does not stand a chance of being anything but a most lamentable fiasco.

CHAPTER VI

FEDERAL HOME RULE

(The Times, 31st October, 1910)

THE object of this letter is to set out in a matter-of-fact way what is meant by the phrase Federal Home Rule. There are, however, considerable difficulties at the outset; for, although the idea has sprung up very vigorously in a great variety of quarters during the past few months, it is impossible to discover any authoritative explanation of the true doctrine. A multitude of references to the subject in newspaper and magazine articles leaves us still searching for some clear and rigorous definition to which we can appeal as conclusive. We are driven to gather the meaning of Federal Home Rule as we best can by a kind of general average. Therefore it may well be that the following account is not

altogether a fair statement of the Federalist case. And it must be understood, further, that the present aim is not advocacy, but only an attempt to lay out the main outlines of this very interesting proposal.

The central idea of Federalism appears to be that our present single Imperial Parliament, which does, or makes an attempt at doing, all the complicated work—first of the Empire, and second of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and third of the various countries which together make up the United Kingdom—is no longer adequate to the purpose. The Federalists therefore propose that the Imperial Parliament, while maintaining its supremacy absolutely intact, shall delegate a large part of its functions to a number of subordinate national or provincial Parliaments, which shall manage the domestic affairs of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, or of such other territorial divisions as may be agreed upon. These national or provincial Parliaments will be entirely independent one of another, but all will acknowledge the full and absolute sovereignty of the Imperial Parliament.

It is contemplated that the Imperial Parlia-

ment shall consist, as at present, of the two historical Chambers—the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The question of the composition and powers of these two Houses—to what extent they are to be changed, or whether they are to be changed at all—may be ignored for the purposes of this analysis; it is enough to say that there will be two Houses, and that what is called the “Lower” House will contain representatives of the whole United Kingdom, distributed fairly and evenly upon the basis of population.

This Imperial Parliament will concern itself with those matters which affect the safety and well-being of the United Kingdom as a whole, and the Empire as a whole. For example, there seems to be a general agreement among the Federalists that Imperial and foreign policy, defence, and all questions of constitutional change, should be in the hands of this supreme Assembly; that it should also be entrusted with certain powers of co-ordination, revision, and veto, with regard to the acts of the subordinate Parliaments; and that it should have the control of the Customs and such other sources of revenue as may be

necessary. This catalogue is obviously not intended to be exhaustive, but merely in the nature of an illustration. The important fact is that the Imperial Parliament is to be representative of the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and that its sovereignty is to be supreme and unquestioned.

It will be seen at a glance that the proposed Imperial Parliament would be something different from, and greater than, the Dominion Parliament of Canada, or the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, or the Union Parliament of South Africa. For, in addition to the important powers which it would exercise with regard to the United Kingdom (and in this respect it would be somewhat on a par with these Parliaments overseas), it would also be charged, as at present, with the whole affairs of the British Empire.

Logically, it may be said, this combination of two different sets of functions is a mistake. If you are going to meddle with our ancient Constitution at all, you ought to make a clean job of it. You ought not to content yourselves with a Parliament which is at one and the same time the Parliament of the United

Kingdom and the Parliament of the British Empire, but should insist on having two Parliaments—one for the United Kingdom and another for the Empire. In the second of these it would then be practicable to secure a representation of the Dominions overseas. At a single stroke we should then possess ourselves of the object of all our hopes—a truly Imperial Parliament.

The logic of this arrangement is attractive, and if we are driven to regard it for the moment as visionary there is no hostile intention in the epithet. Most things worth doing have been visions at one period or another of their history. The United States in 1786 were nothing more substantial. Union was then only the “mad project of visionary young men,” and was denounced as such and derided as such by most greybeards of experience. And yet in 1788 the United States was an accomplished fact. Nor are other instances far to seek. What more visionary project was there in 1848—ay, and much later—than a German Empire? Yet in 1870 there was a four-square, victorious unity as strong as ever was the Holy Roman Empire, and much more

closely knit. There is, therefore, no reason why those who see this vision of an Imperial Union should be discouraged by the cold verdict of common sense. Let them rather take the rebuff as a good omen, and have the courage to remain visionaries yet a little longer.

But for the moment common sense is likely to prevail over visions—over the highest wisdom even, if you choose to put it in that way. We are a slow-moving people. If it be possible to do a thing in two steps, we would always do it in two steps rather than in one. It is our nature so to act, and upon the whole, looking back to the days of the Magna Charta, can we honestly say that the method has worked badly, or that the contrast with others which promised a quicker harvest is unfavourable?

In the Federalist idea, then, the Imperial Parliament will be the supreme authority, not only in the United Kingdom, but also, for the time being, in the Empire as well. But it will delegate a very large part of its functions to a certain number of national Parliaments. And here we arrive at a considerable difference of view. What is to be the number of these

national Parliaments? The Federalists are not in complete agreement among themselves upon this important point. On the one side the extreme opinion is that there are to be only two—a national Parliament for Great Britain and another national Parliament for Ireland. The extreme opinion on the other side is that there is to be a more or less arbitrary division on a basis of population; that nationality is to be ignored in favour of units more or less equal in numbers; that there is to be a “restoration of the Heptarchy” in England; a division of Scotland into the Highlands and a pair of Lowlands; of Ireland into the four Provinces; Wales alone remaining unparcelled. These are the extremes; but if we may judge by what has already appeared in print, neither of them is regarded favourably by the majority of Federalists.

The advocates of a third course propose that there should be four national Parliaments—a Parliament for England, another for Scotland, another for Ireland, and another for Wales. And they urge us to accept this arrangement, not so much as a compromise between two extremes, as because the division

suggested corresponds with certain historical ideas of national life. They contend that the success of the Federal idea depends not at all upon equality of numbers, but upon a spiritual force, upon the intimate association of men possessing a common tradition. They admit frankly that they set sentiment above any purely practical considerations. They claim that the result under their plan will be more dignified and vital than any artificial combination into groups of counties ; and that it will be a thing much safer, much less liable to schism, than a division into two. In the "heptarchical" plan they see nothing which would appeal vividly to the imagination. In the separation of Ireland alone they see the danger which would arise out of an invidious distinction. They are haunted by the discouraging precedents of Norway and Sweden, and of Austria and Hungary.

It is no part of the purpose of this letter to argue upon these proposals *pro* and *con*, but merely to state them, as fairly as the writer is able, upon the information at hand. Nor is it any part of his purpose to enter into a premature and lengthy discussion of

the powers, functions, and duties with which it has been proposed by one writer and another to clothe these national parliaments; nor of the restrictions and safeguards with which it is suggested that they should be hedged round. Every writer has his own ideas upon these points, and it would be a fruitless business to endeavour here to extract any common denominator.

But one point emerges clearly from the constitutional fog: these national parliaments, whether they be two, or four, or four-and-twenty, are to be co-ordinate parliaments. None is to be above another; nor are they to be in any way responsible one to another. They are to be responsible, within their Constitutions, only to the Imperial Parliament, and only the Imperial Parliament is to be above them. These national parliaments are not to be what Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman would have had them—Canadas; they are to be in the position which the parliaments of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia occupy in relation to the Dominion Parliament at Ottawa.

No Federalist seems to have undertaken

seriously the task of showing how the financial difficulty, arising out of the fact that Ireland at the present time is costing more than she is contributing to the revenue, is to be met. Perhaps this abstinence is wise ; for although in a sense the financial difficulty is the crux of the whole question, it is pre-eminently a subject which is unfit for platform and newspaper discussion until it has been examined and reported upon by a body of practical politicians. It would be one of the most important, and probably by far the most laborious, of the tasks to be undertaken by the convention to set out the financial issues so simply that they could be submitted to the popular judgment in a form which would be rightly understood. The Federalist would probably maintain that if the main fabric of his proposals is approved, no mere question of pounds, shillings, and pence will be allowed to stand in the way. He may be right in this. John Bull, when properly approached, is not a niggardly fellow. But, on the other hand, money is one of the cardinal considerations of politics. The lack of it before now has turned back victorious armies, broken

up invincible alliances, destroyed great kingdoms. It is not wise, therefore, to count it only as a trifle in the present discussion, though it probably is very wise indeed to leave it over for experts to investigate.

Two things, however, are clear enough : the first, that this plan is essentially different from either of those which are associated with the name of Mr. Gladstone ; the second, that it is not new in principle, but bears a considerable resemblance to what was originally put forward in the early seventies by Mr. Butt when he founded the Home Rule party.

Federalism differs from Mr. Gladstone's schemes, and is, from a constitutional point of view, immensely superior to either of them, because it secures the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament without setting up the dangerous friction which must necessarily ensue from the subordination of one Parliament, which is purely national, to another Parliament, which is also national, but which is at the same time clothed with the Imperial sovereignty. Under either of Mr. Gladstone's plans the Irish Parliament must ever have been the inferior of the English Parliament,

and the Unionist party were right in their contention that such an imperfect settlement was a great deal worse than no settlement at all. In the Federal plan, however, the Parliaments of England and Ireland are to be co-ordinate, and the Imperial Parliament is to be supreme over both. Another of the vices, from a purely constitutional point of view, in Mr. Gladstone's first plan was that it introduced the false principle of taxation without representation; in the second, that the capricious ingenuity of its "in-and-out" clauses must necessarily have resulted in a dangerous friction. Both of these evils are avoided in Federalism, though it would not be safe to assume too readily that Federalism contains no peculiar weaknesses of its own.

In its essential features the modern Federalism differs from the main idea of Mr. Butt's original programme of 1873, chiefly in the condition that Home Rule is to be granted to England and Scotland and Wales, or to some other territorial divisions, at the same time as it is granted to Ireland and no sooner. It is, in fact, only the original ante-Parnellite Home Rule "writ large."

Mr. Butt set out seriously at the beginning of Mr. Disraeli's Government of 1874 to convert the British Parliament by reasonable persuasion to his way of thinking. He combined considerable constructive ability with a most attractive personality, and a great gift of argument and eloquence. He was not afraid, like most of his successors, to put forward a positive suggestion; he was not merely the critic, and he was rarely, if ever, a crude obstructionist. No English statesman—not even his fellow-countryman Edmund Burke—showed a greater veneration for the traditions of the Imperial Parliament.

For three or four years Butt pleaded his case in season. But he failed to plead it out of season. That was, perhaps, his chief fault from the parliamentary standpoint, and one of the main causes of his undoing. It was his misfortune to be the leader of an able but inexperienced and exceedingly impatient party, who entertained a disastrous confidence that the slow and stately process by which alone an idea had ever hitherto won its way at Westminster was a thing which could be hurried and jostled forward by a violent procedure.

His eager and brilliant lieutenants mistook the discomfort and discomfiture of their opponents for a rapid progress. They aimed not, like Isaac Butt, at conversion, but at coercion; they soon abandoned constitutional agitation in favour of a deliberate policy of outrage, by obstruction at Westminster and violence out of doors. And, without a doubt, they succeeded in their immediate aim. They won a series of showy but most sterile victories. They made an end of free debate. They dealt to popular government one of the worst blows which it has ever sustained. But for all that they have not yet succeeded in arriving at the goal which they set out to seek.

The miraculous good fortune which attended Mr. Parnell's efforts as a parliamentary anarchist, the complete success with which he contrived to wreck the old parliamentary traditions, have rather blinded us to the fact that what Mr. Butt failed to win by patient advocacy in his short four years of leadership Mr. Parnell failed equally to win after thirteen years of furious and bitter controversy. Nearly twenty years have passed since Parnell died, and the policy to which he gave his life labours

still unfulfilled under the curse of his unforgiven victories. The old fable of the traveller and his cloak, when the sun and the wind made their wager, has no more apposite illustration in political affairs.

Mr. Parnell was a very brave man. His success, judged by the narrow test of parliamentary technique, was possibly all that enthusiastic Liberals and Irishmen throughout the world proclaimed it to be at the zenith of his popularity. But nearly half of the Scriptural span of a man's life has gone by since Parnellism was invented, and it has not yet arrived at its goal. Could even Mr. Butt, whom his comrades deposed because, in their opinion, he lacked the necessary political instinct and vigour, have done worse than this? We may all conjecture freely in the region of that science which Lord Acton called "hypothetics." Everyone is entitled to his own opinion with regard to the things which might have happened, but did not happen. Yet when you come to think of it in a cool hour, and to consider carefully the delicate condition of British politics between 1874 and 1886, it seems scarcely credible, whether Home Rule

were a bad or a good thing in itself, that it could have failed to become the law of the land except by a kind of miracle. Is it not more than probable that Mr. Butt, working patiently and unrestingly, like Mr. Cobden, with the weapon of reasonable persuasion, would have won in ten years what Mr. Parnell, with outrage and its legacy of distrust and hatred, has made impossible for three-and-thirty ?

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

(The Times, 2nd November, 1910)

THE writer has been accused in certain quarters of trying to persuade the Unionist party, to which he has the honour to belong, to take up Home Rule. He has made no such attempt. On the contrary, he has ventured to utter a warning that, even if the Unionist party were honestly converted to Home Rule, it is not for them to undertake the task or to snatch at the credit of passing this policy into law. In view of this and other misconceptions which have arisen, not unnaturally, out of a somewhat lengthy correspondence extending over a considerable period, it seems desirable to restate as shortly as possible the general arguments which have been already advanced.

The present Conference was called into

existence in order to consider, and, if possible, to agree upon, some settlement of a grave constitutional question—the powers and the composition of the House of Lords. If the Conference is able to agree there is no more to be said. These letters will then have been entirely superfluous. But their needlessness will be easily forgotten and forgiven in a general rejoicing. Supposing, however, that the Conference is not able to agree upon a settlement owing to the insistence of another grave constitutional question, it has been urged that it would then be desirable to call together another conference or convention, with a wider warrant, to consider the constitutional problem as a whole.

Following the precedents which have been set by the most democratic communities—by the United States of America on the one hand and by South Africa on the other—it has been proposed that a convention should be summoned to meet at an early date; that this convention should be composed not merely of official persons, as at present, but should be broadly representative of the various main divisions and shades of political opinion in

their fair proportions; that it should sit behind closed doors to consider, and, if possible, to agree upon, a proposal for ending our present difficulties; and that, having arrived at a set of proposals to this end, it should then lay them before the people, or the representatives of the people, for their acceptance, amendment, or rejection.

There is nothing new, neither is there anything contrary to the theory or the practice of popular government, in this proposal. In theory it is unexceptionable. In practice it has been followed by other English-speaking States with the most admirable results. There is nothing fantastical about it. It is no hole-and-corner device for "dishing the democracy"; and although it is doubtless true enough to say that the method has been adopted only upon very rare occasions, it must be borne in mind that changes in the Constitution of a great country are not things of everyday occurrence. In cases where changes of this sort have become pressing, where they have been strongly urged on the one hand and strongly combated on the other, where both sides have been in earnest, and

where neither will submit, sometimes the solution has been found in conference and agreement, sometimes in civil war. Of these alternatives, most sensible people would prefer the former. And we must bear in mind, also, that, in spite of all casuistry to the contrary, you cannot abolish or destroy the House of Lords within the terms of our Constitution without the consent of the House of Lords itself.

It has been no part of the purpose of these letters to advocate Home Rule for Ireland, either of the Gladstonian or the Federal pattern, but only to contend that there is a good case for a fresh inquiry before a tribunal which, while thoroughly popular in its composition, will meet and deliberate under circumstances and conditions making for a cooler and more reasonable consideration than the subject has yet received. This plea for a fresh examination is based upon the lapse of time—a whole generation; upon the changed conditions both of Ireland and the Empire in the meanwhile; and upon the fact that a new proposal, called Federalism, which claims to be able to reconcile Irish aspirations with the

spirit of a firm and sovereign union, has received a strong support among men of widely different political views and not wanting in practical experience.

It can hardly be denied that the conditions in Ireland, both as regards material prosperity and political agitation, have changed very much for the better since a quarter of a century ago. Although things still remain far from perfect, there is to-day a new and a more settled Ireland. For this result the constructive policy of the Unionist party may rightly claim the lion's share of the credit; and it should in justice be added that the devoted service, through good and evil report, of a singularly disinterested and patriotic gentleman (with a fine sense of humour) will be remembered as one of the chief factors in this amelioration long after many names more conspicuous in contemporary politics have passed out of memory.

But no attempt has been made to prejudge the issue. Federalism may not, after all, be able to find us a way out of our present difficulties. Some other road may be found which has superior advantages, or no road at

all may be found. The object of these letters is not the advocacy of Federalism or of any other policy, but only to make an earnest appeal that the whole question of constitutional change may be considered and reported upon by a body of men competent to deal with it—the picked representatives of all the political parties chosen in a fair proportion. The fact that they are all of them strong party men will have no ill effect, for if they seek a settlement seriously and truly, they will from that very fact cease from acting as blind partisans.

It has been urged, further, that this proposed convention should discuss the matter behind closed doors, avoiding thereby the dangers which attach to rhetorical and heated debate; that they should pursue their work patiently (as other good citizens and strong party men have done before now in Philadelphia, Cape Town, and elsewhere), and should endeavour quietly, reasonably, courteously, and in a businesslike spirit, to arrive at a solution which they can honourably and with confidence submit to their fellow-countrymen and ask them to accept.

What is there in this fantastical or visionary? Have we lost our political instinct for settling things—that genius for popular government which has saved us time and again from revolution—about which we are never tired of boasting ourselves to be the superiors of the whole world and an example for other nations to follow? In the practical give-and-take of life, in that mingling of equity with an understanding sympathy which lies at the root of every binding bargain, have we grown to be the inferiors of the children sprung from our own loins? Have we become so querulous and obstinate in our old age, so involved in the traditional feuds of the Montagues and the Capulets, that we have lost sight of our common interests and all sense of a true proportion? The Constitution is our bond of union as a nation, and if it is sought to change it, the nation, and not merely a bare majority of the nation, must be brought to consent.

The objections to Gladstonian Home Rule are many, and, as Unionists and many Liberals believe, insuperable. The objections to Federal Home Rule are doubtless also many; but we do not as yet know, for we have not inquired,

whether they are actually insuperable or not. The objections to any new course are always many. The acceptance of Federalism or of any other form of Home Rule which can be imagined would almost certainly mean the sacrifice of a great deal by the Unionist party, and the Unionist party would probably be ready to sacrifice a great deal if it were clearly shown that the national and Imperial gains would be worth the concession—with this one proviso, and it is important, that the lives, liberties, and well-being of our fellow-Unionists in Ireland are secured absolutely and beyond a doubt.

There is no intention to minimize or ignore the familiar but weighty arguments which may possibly apply to Federalism as well as to previous varieties of Home Rule—the danger of jobbery; the danger of an English, Scots, Irish, or Welsh Parliament which should resemble the Dublin Corporation; the danger of religious persecution, of agrarianism, of unjust taxation levelled against the Protestants and the industrial portion of Ulster; the danger of the cry which demagogues may set up for the repudiation of debts owing to

British stockholders in Land Consols ; the philosophic argument that constitutional change should always be of a centripetal character, and never centrifugal. And there is also the new and forcible argument that the demand for Home Rule is dying out—that it has, in fact, been killed by kindness—which, if true, would shorten the work of the convention and end the whole matter. For it does not necessarily follow that Home Rule would be a good, or even a tolerable, institution simply because Home Rulers have ceased to desire it and Unionists have ceased to fear it. To insist in the interests of good feeling upon endowing an apathetic Ireland with Home Rule would be a somewhat ludicrous proceeding—a paradox almost more Irish, if we may use the expression without offence, than anything in Irish history.

Nor would it be right to disregard the apprehension that an Irish Parliament would consist to all intents and purposes of a single, overwhelming, and firmly united party, led by Mr. Redmond or Mr. Dillon, and blessed by the Church (though it may be submitted that this result would be somewhat surprising) ;

that there would be no place in it for active and businesslike men of the Protestant creed, and that all landowners, manufacturers, and merchants would be rigorously excluded in favour of the same elements which compose the Nationalist party at present. None of these considerations, however fanciful, however improbable they may appear, can, or ought to be, excluded from the purview of the convention, but to the convention they ought, in the first instance, to be submitted, to be examined by it with the most scrupulous attention.

But criticism also comes from the opposite quarter. It is urged by enthusiastic Federalists that only the machinery of their plan, and not the spirit of it, has been explained in these letters; that the whole treatment of their proposals has been of too apologetic a character, and has been made to appear too much as a compromise or a surrender, necessary, perhaps, but none the less regrettable, of some of the interests of Unionism. For these Federalists claim confidently for their plan that it is a development of true Unionism, of the "Toryism" of Burke and Disraeli—in no sense a

going back, but, on the contrary, a going forward on the path of safety. They claim that by setting up a supreme Imperial Parliament, with a certain number of subordinate parliaments of a national or provincial character, we should thereby extricate ourselves to a very large extent from that hopeless confusion of principles which, as things now stand, is altogether unavoidable. The complaint at present is that, owing to the demands of party, the plain man is called upon to compromise his opinions to such an extent that the result is a kind of political make-believe—a stagnation, at any rate, if not an actual dishonesty. There is a wide field, and over the whole of it two forces are at combat—the Radical coalition and the Unionists. You are required to go all the way with the one or the other, or else accept the position of a pariah dog. To remain a good and true Radical or Unionist a man has to be always giving away this or that to save the other part of his beliefs. An endless compromise is going on, and too great sacrifices of principle are demanded of us by the party machine. We make sometimes hasty and very bad bargains. An inordinate

strain is put upon the sincerity of our public life. Political action is to a large extent paralyzed and stalemated by the exorbitant concessions which we are required to make.

There are three great ideas which at present occupy in a varying proportion the minds of all thoughtful persons who are interested in politics: How to raise the condition of the mass of our people; how to unite the Empire; how to defend the Empire. There is no real antagonism between these aims. A man may be keenly alive to the evils of want and to the other evils which arise out of the forlorn and degraded state of large sections of our people, who are oppressed not so much by a grinding poverty as by the mere lack of the knowledge how to live. He may also desire to hold and to bind together, before it is too late, the greatest fabric of power which the world has ever seen. And, finally, he may be concerned to take wise and safe precautions—neither too much nor too little—so that we may live in security from foreign aggression. But under present conditions he is forbidden to do all three. He must to some extent make a choice or a compromise between them. And

why? Because, as things stand, there is a ridiculous competition for the time and attention of one parliament and one cabinet. We have an Imperial assembly with only a *limited* time at its disposal, even if it were to sit all the year through, but with an *unlimited* warrant—one and the same assembly to decide about a school in a Welsh village, a naval loan, our relations with the Dominion of Canada, and our policy with regard to the Chinese Empire. Consequently, we are driven into opposition to this and that, not because the principle of the proposal is obnoxious to us, but simply from a lack of time. Our adversary's activity interferes by so much with our own chances of getting a policy carried out which we consider to be even more important than his. We may agree with his policy, and he may agree with ours, but as the time and energy of a centralized parliament and a centralized government are finite quantities, either his project or our own must go to the wall. The plain fact is that in this great country of ours, teeming as it is with able and willing and public-spirited men, we are only employing to-day about the same number of

them to attend to our public affairs as we did in the reigns of Queen Anne or George III. And all the time things needing to be done are clamouring at the doors of Westminster, unheeded for the most part, unless they are capable of yielding some highly sensational party advantages or advertisement. Which of our youngest dominions has so few parliaments as we have to do its work? Which of them has anything approaching the work that we have requiring to be done?

Obviously, if you agree to divide the functions of your present Parliament, and to set up in its place one supreme Parliament and a certain number of subordinate national or provincial parliaments, you will greatly lessen this confusion and waste of good energy. And you will at the same time improve the quality of your parliaments. For when you have men chosen to attend to a certain set of duties, the chances are that they will have a more thorough knowledge of these duties than if the scope is infinity. And if they have a more thorough knowledge they will talk less nonsense.

An Imperial Parliament elected to attend

solely to Imperial affairs would be much less likely to be either a jingo or a peace-at-any-price Parliament than one elected under present conditions. And the national or provincial parliaments, though they will doubtless make their mistakes and their rash experiments, like the London County Council, will tend, like the London County Council, to be made up more and more as time goes on of men who are serious and practical students of the particular set of problems with which they have to deal. And the results will certainly be a gain for sanity and sound judgment. Quacks do not thrive in a company where things are fairly well understood. If the Imperial Parliament would be more efficient, less subject, on the one hand, to neglect of armaments, on the other hand to panic, than our present one, so, also, would these national and provincial parliaments be less vapid, rhetorical, and phrasemongering about all social matters than our present one. The flamboyant jingo, the penny-wise-pound-foolish navy economist, the crude Socialist, the immovable optimist, who clings to the belief that what was good

enough for his great-grandfather's workpeople must still be good enough for his own—these are the classes who would pine and dwindle out of public life under the Federalist plan.

The Federalists assure us that we may hope for benefits even beyond these—to get rid of the closure, “the destroyer of parliaments”; to abate the power of the caucus, which will be unable to carry its tyrannical ticket when there are several parliaments to deal with instead of only one; to restore cabinet government, which has almost ceased to be an organic thing, and resembles on occasions nothing so much as a set of stalls at a fair, each minister going his own way, and crying up his own character and commodities in an immodest and undignified competition. It may even be possible under the Federal arrangement for the functions of Prime Minister once more to be discharged effectively and with some kind of mastery by a mere human being, which, as things now stand, is clearly impossible.

It has been contended that the introduction of Federalism into the United Kingdom would make Imperial union harder, and not easier,

to achieve. And if this argument were well founded, it would knock the bottom out of the whole case so far as Unionists are concerned. But the contention seems to rest mainly, if not solely, on this—that if the United Kingdom be divided into four, or eight, or whatever number you like, of provincial and national parliaments, you will then have to win the assent of each one of these parliaments in turn to any scheme of Imperial union which may ultimately be proposed. You will have to negotiate with a number of separate Governments, and not with the single Imperial Parliament which exists to-day. This objection would have applied to either of Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bills, but clearly it does not apply to Federalism. Under the Federal proposals the Imperial Parliament is to be entirely separate. It is to be directly representative of the people of the United Kingdom, irrespective of race or nationality. The Imperial Parliament will, therefore, be the only assembly that will have to be considered in such a matter. It is difficult, therefore, to see where the alleged impediment comes in.

But the Federalists, we may imagine, would

not be content to stand merely upon the defensive in regard to this aspect of the subject. They would urge that under their scheme the union of the Empire will be made much easier. The dominions, they would say, are at present very shy of entering into our discussions—even into those which are intimately concerned with their own safety. For example, it is most difficult to arrive at a full understanding even on the question of defence, which concerns them all. And the reason is quite plain. Too many local, provincial, and national matters are mixed up in our political situation. Too great a confusion of party issues, minor and major, exists under our present parliamentary system ; so that it is next to impossible for the dominions to support any line of policy without immediately finding themselves identified with one or other of our British or Irish parties. Thereupon they are at once denounced by the one side and—a result equally offensive to their feelings—claimed as allies by the other. This difficulty would not be entirely done away with, but it would certainly be greatly diminished under a Federal arrangement.

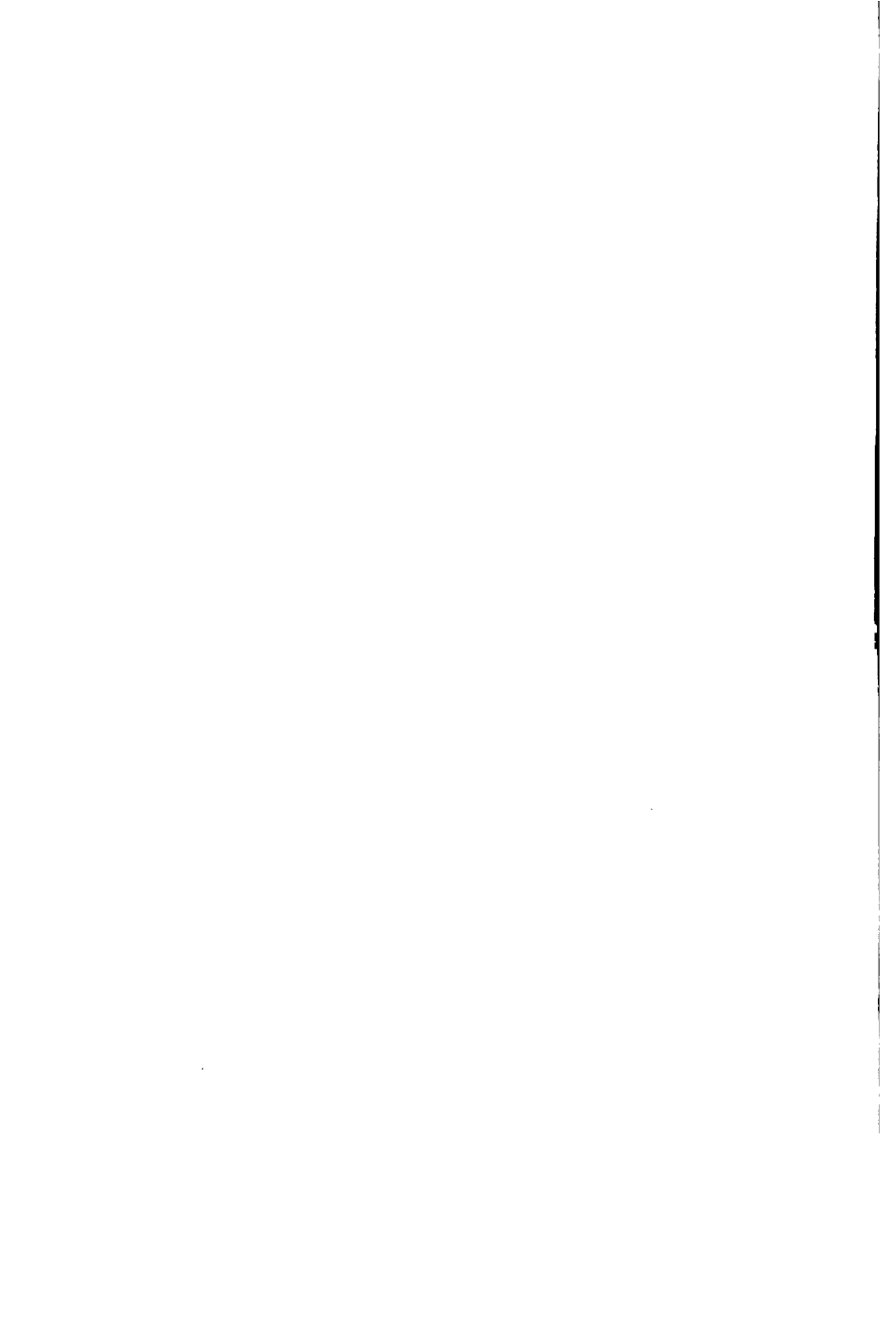
Again, there is the consideration which was alluded to in an earlier letter—the opinion, very prevalent among our best friends in the dominions, that the obdurate discontent of Ireland under the present arrangement, her absolute refusal to play the game of popular government under the existing rules, is a proof that England is an oppressive and domineering partner, and that proposals for a closer union with the United Kingdom are therefore to be regarded by statesmen overseas with a considerable degree of suspicion.

These views are worthy of careful consideration. But the Federalists have, perhaps, an even stronger case when they contend that the mere fact of the proposed conference or convention being able to arrive at a settlement would greatly help, though indirectly, the cause of Imperial partnership or union. For one of our greatest difficulties hitherto has been the initial difficulty—how to begin. How are we to discover some method consistent with popular government for examining into our common problems and arriving at an understanding between the United Kingdom and the dominions with regard to them? But

if this convention should succeed in disposing of such grave and long-standing constitutional difficulties as those of Irish discontent and the House of Lords, to the satisfaction of the majority of sensible men, will it not create a precedent of inestimable value, as showing that by this method other great changes may be shaped with safety?

I would end as I began. If this Conference comes to utter failure it will be a great disaster. If, on the other hand, it reaches success, either at a first or at a second effort,* it will be one of the greatest deeds ever done in British history. The results will relieve us of a grave present danger, and they will reach far into the future of our race. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

* The first effort has failed. Will there be a second effort?



APPENDIX A

ON THE NEED FOR CALLING A CONFERENCE

(The Times, 23rd May, 1910)

It is very desirable that we should entertain no illusions with regard to the nature of the strife with which we are now threatened. If we once enter upon it—at present we are standing at the brink—the struggle must be long and very bitter. These two evils at least are certainties in a future otherwise exceedingly obscure.

If the next General Election should result in an unmistakable and sweeping victory for one or other of the political parties, it seems probable that in either case sacrilegious hands will forthwith be laid upon the Constitution. Which side soever wins, the Constitution is to be reshaped in some way or another; and it is to be reshaped by partisans acting consciously or unconsciously in the interests of their respective parties. If the Unionists win, the House of Lords is to be “strengthened.” If the Liberals win, it is to be limited in its

functions and "democratized." There is probably as much danger in the one course as in the other. But the greatest danger of all lies, not in any particular course, but in the fact that you will then have begun in deadly earnest a game which has never yet been played out in any country without ending either in civil war or in national ruin. Supposing you are bent on changing your Constitution (always a more or less hazardous undertaking), the change, if it is to be loyally accepted and to endure, must be carried by general consent of the nation, and not by the drilled battalions of one or other of the political parties.

It does not need any great gift of political imagination to foresee that in such a case the party which has been beaten, and which has had a set of crude and partisan changes rammed down its throat, will occupy its energies until the ensuing election in agitating for a fresh change in the Constitution to redress the real or supposed injustice which has been inflicted on it by its opponents ; while the party which has won will endeavour to entrench its reforms so as to put it beyond the reach of the other side to alter them when they come back to power. But all such efforts at entrenchment will be in vain, because the new institutions, owing to the manner of their creation, will lack the moral support and loyalty which can only be born out of some kind of general consent. No safeguards will be strong enough

to prop up and keep in place these party-tinkered reformatations. And when the "Outs" become the "Ins," as with the help of the pendulum they must some day, our unhappy Constitution will be laid upon the anvil once more and battered into another shape, as distasteful as possible to the intentions of the previous artificers.

Meanwhile everything else suffers. External affairs—defence and diplomacy—are neglected, internal reforms are indefinitely delayed, the movement for Imperial union and co-operation is brought to a standstill, and even to some extent discredited, in order that we may endure interminable debates between the most distinguished logicians and rhetoricians of the day. Not only will this be a very dangerous game for the country and for the Empire, but it will also be the most tedious business in the world for everybody who is interested in politics because he wants to get something or other done. The prolonged crisis will bring up a huge crop of shallow disputants, fluent and forensic, understanding nothing, but delighting in cheap scores, in strokes made for the gallery, in a gushing sentimentality, and in sonorous platitudes. Lawyers of the second and third order may be expected to thrive on it, but it will be a good time for no other class of mankind.

And is there no way out of it? If we really believe in our hearts (as most of us do) that

we cannot afford—that it is too perilous—to let the Constitution become an item in the party game, that not even the Crown itself ought to be more rigorously kept out of it, can we not then discover some entirely different method, some means injurious to the feelings of neither side, for getting rid of so grave a national danger? Recent events have shown us clearly that if the crisis comes the Crown must inevitably be drawn into it. No man desires such an evil consummation; few men, indeed, but would willingly, in their private capacity as simple citizens, make personal sacrifices to avoid it. We shrink from the thought of clouding the new reign with so inauspicious a beginning. The swift stroke of death has brought our Empire to a sudden pause, and it would be well to use the time of truce for searching our hearts and weighing carefully the results of fierce and inconsiderate action.

The way which seems to fit the occasion best, seeing that the matter in hand is no ordinary legislative measure, but the very framework of government, is the way adopted at Philadelphia in 1787, when the Constitution of the United States was hammered into shape; the way adopted only last year in South Africa—the way of common sense and sobriety, when men are really in deadly earnest about an object of vital importance—a *conference with closed doors*. The most mis-

chievous politician is apt to grow into a perfectly reasonable and conciliatory animal as soon as the limelight is turned off. Patriotism has a way of becoming prevalent when a dozen or so of gentlemen—even though they differ exceedingly in most of their political opinions—sit quietly round a table and speak to one another without the dangerous accompaniment of cheers from excited henchmen. Such a conference between the leaders on both sides would probably have the same result in our case that it has had among men of our own race in other lands and at other times. This result, I feel confident, would be a working compromise of some sort, accepted—grudgingly, perhaps, but still accepted—by a substantial majority of the members.

When first announced out of doors, in all likelihood it will receive a very cold welcome. It will stir little enthusiasm, except among that comparatively small minority in whose thoughts the urgency of peace is uppermost. But in most quarters it will be received, if not with transports of joy, at least with a sigh of relief; and gradually the good sense of the British people will prevail over their natural combativeness, and what has been agreed to will be loyally upheld.

In 1787 political feeling was running very high in America; some of the States were within an ace of civil war. In South Africa, in 1909, men met in the convention who had

fought upon opposite sides in a long and bitter struggle. The death in battle of friends and kindred, the ruin of homesteads, and all the inevitable grief and desolation of war, were still green memories; and in spite of these things, and because the welfare of America in the one case and of South Africa in the other required that agreements should be come to, these men agreed.

Agreement is the need of England to-day, and surely the obstacles in our way to agreement are light things by comparison. The wounds which gall us have been inflicted mainly by printer's ink. The injuries which we have suffered, or which we imagine ourselves to have suffered, are due very largely to fancy overheated by rhetoric. They reproach us with a certain unreality, if we allow our thoughts to travel back to Spion Kop and Paardeberg. We run the risk not only of making ourselves supremely ridiculous in the eyes of our friends and our enemies all the world over, but of throwing discredit upon the principle of popular government at its very source. If we do not speedily find a way of agreeing with one another in the gate, we shall assuredly figure in history as a generation given over to faction and frivolously regardless of the true proportions of national policy.

APPENDIX B

ON THE DREAD OF COMPROMISE

(The Times, 6th June, 1910)

AGREEMENT to hold a convention is not compromise : it is merely an acknowledgment by each side that the opinions of its opponents are honestly held.

Suppose that the people of these islands can be brought to view the idea of a convention favourably, even then we are some way removed from compromise—that bugbear of virtuous minds. For the main and primary business of such a convention would not be the arrangement of any bargain or compromise, but the patient discovery of the extent to which the opposing parties are really in agreement. Our convention, if it at all resembles other conventions of a similar character, will discover very quickly that among the majority of its members agreement as to principles extends over a much larger area than anyone had previously imagined. In its tolerant, businesslike, and courteous atmosphere

matters of difference will no longer present themselves in an overwhelming multitude. Even their individual importance is likely to prove less formidable than had been supposed.

A very large part of the difficulties in all negotiations—in political no less than in commercial affairs—falls into the following category.—One side, let us say the Liberals, is determined to establish a certain principle at all costs. Accordingly, it puts forward proposals which it believes will secure the desired end. The Unionists, indifferent to the principle in question, or, at any rate, by no means so keenly concerned to establish it, examine the particular proposals with suspicion, and are shocked to find that they open the door to a number of very grave dangers and abuses. In their excitement at this discovery, they overlook the fact that these same dangers and abuses (whether altogether real or to some extent only imaginary) were certainly not intended, or desired, or even foreseen, by their opponents when the proposals were originated. But thereupon, nevertheless, according to the best traditions of party government, such a hot and vigorous attack is delivered by the Unionists against the Liberals that the issue is at once involved in a sublime dust and confusion. The sacred principle which no Unionist challenges, the defective method of securing it, to which no Liberal is wedded, become inextric-

ably confounded together. And although in the abstract the Unionist may approve of the end, while the Liberal in cold blood may be willing to admit that the means he suggested for attaining it are open to criticism, battle is joined with the utmost heartiness all along the line.

The remedy is plain enough : to find some other way of reaching an object which no one opposes, by a method which keeps the door closed against the dangers and abuses which no one desires. The parties certainly aim at different things. But to what extent are these different things incompatible ? If two friends, with ten shillings between them, sit down to order dinner at a tavern, and the heart of the one be set upon eating half a Porterhouse steak, while the other is determined, at all costs, to split a bottle of Burgundy, why should the gentlemen quarrel ? Each of them can have it his own way without offence to the other. There need be no breach of a lifelong friendship, no waste of a good appetite. With a pinch of common sense the ten precious shillings may be liquidated and transmuted in the most agreeable fashion imaginable.

So far as we have yet gone in forecasting the procedure of our convention, we have not found it necessary, be it observed, to call in compromise at a single point. Under the blessing of Providence it is conceivable that a

convention—even in this our present situation of difficulty—might reach its final goal without resorting to compromise of any kind. But it is safer to assume that even after the convention has thoroughly cleared the ground, after the points upon which there is full agreement have been ascertained, after those disagreements which attach to the means, and not to the ends, have been put out of the way and satisfactorily adjusted, there will still remain a certain number of differences between the parties which can only be got rid of by concessions on one side or on the other, or on both. Here at last, if agreement is to be come to, we are faced with the need for compromise. And why should we be so shy of an expedient which, under the more homely name of give-and-take, plays such an important part in the daily affairs of each of us? Not a shop, or a factory, or an office, or a bank, could carry on its business for a single day, or for any respectable fraction of a day, without the help of this humble lubricant. It enters into all our relations with our friends and neighbours; and is there, even in England (where the domestic virtues reach their finest flower), any home so peaceful and concordant that the services of compromise are not called for in the course of every four-and-twenty hours?

It has never been suggested that the convention should have power to bind the nation without the consent of the nation's representa-

ives. That would be absurd and intolerable. If the bargaining is to go on in private, obviously there must be a public ratification, or else a rejection of the terms. We are not going to allow ourselves to be led blindfold, even by the twelve wisest subjects of King George. But when concessions are under discussion, a convention with closed doors has great advantages over a public debate. There are no worse arrangers of terms than two large masses of men drawn up in opposing camps. Popular leaders cease as a rule to be leaders when they cease to be popular. It is essential to them that the eyes of men should remain riveted upon their actions and persons, and it is always very much easier to attain this object by making people angry than by making them shake hands. The principle of government by parties, with all its virtues, finds no place of honour for the peacemaker. I intend no disparagement of a system which has worked, on the whole, a good deal better than any other system; but we must not set it to solve problems which it is clearly quite unfit to cope with. It is a sort of disease common to all masses ranged under rival banners that they tend inevitably to exaggerate points of difference, and are hard to conciliate.

The great hope of a successful issue to the deliberations of a convention with closed doors lies in the fact that at the present time neither party is interested in keeping the constitutional

question open. For both parties are much more concerned to do things than to prevent things from being done. Both have their constructive programmes. In this respect our times are different from some other epochs. The Conservatives of the sixties, seventies, and eighties would not have been altogether averse from a constitutional wrangle (at the long end of which they foresaw pretty certainly a party victory), because wrangling prevents legislation; and of legislation—especially of legislation in the interests of the middle classes—they were weary. The Foxite Whigs promoted revolutionary constitutional ideas because they hated the Napoleonic wars, and wrangling distracts attention and withdraws support from national policy. But with us it is different. Both sides, speaking vulgarly, “want to get a move on.” There may be a few old crusted Tories who are still ready to risk the Constitution in order to stop grandmotherly legislation, and a few old crusted Liberals who think anything short of civil war a good thing so long as it keeps the thoughts of the working classes off Tariff Reform. But the number as well as the influence of these is very small. The predominant feeling on both sides is for spending the shortest possible time in tinkering at the machinery and for getting to work at once.

But in one sphere of politics there is no room for compromise or bargaining. Both

parties may accept without dishonour some modification of the Constitution which is not perhaps entirely to their liking, providing only that it gives them fair play for carrying out their ideas if they came into power. But no party without dishonour could enter into a bargain that it would abstain from or hang up any part of its constructive policy, even in order to get the constitutional question out of the way. As a Unionist I should rejoice to see Mr. Lloyd George and his Radical followers honestly converted from what appears to me to be a ruinous policy for nationalizing the land by instalments; but, frankly, I think it would be a bad thing for public life were he to agree to put aside this aim (so long as he believes in it sincerely) as part of some general constitutional compact. In the same way, for the Unionists to agree to jettison Tariff Reform would be a public calamity. Any bargain of this kind would be a timid and scandalous bargain. It would not stand the stress of events. It would have no reasonable basis, no hold upon the hearts and consciences of men.

You can bargain and make concessions about institutions, about the machinery, about the rules of the game; but you can make no bargain that, when it comes to your turn, you will not play the game to the utmost of your skill, or that you will not put forth your full strength. The domain of compromise is

clearly fixed, and within that sphere it is one of the best of the political virtues; but if you seek to extend it into other spheres it becomes a degradation and the vainest of all futilities.

APPENDIX C

ON THE CONDITIONS OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

(The Times, 8th June, 1910)

IF such a conference is to have the best chances of success, four conditions appear to be essential—it must be small; its meetings must be held with closed doors; it must be an affair between principals; and, above all, it must be free.

Of the first two it is unnecessary to say more than has already been advanced. The smaller the size of the convocation the more wholesome will be the atmosphere. We shall then get away from oratory altogether, and we shall also eliminate most, if not all, contention of a purely personal kind.

“Closed doors” is a phrase which ought to be construed, in the broadest interpretation of which it is capable, as meaning not merely the absence of reporters and the public from the discussions, but a strict and honourable reticence on the part of the members, even

in their most private conversations, during the period of its sessions.

And equally important is the consideration that the convention must be an affair between principals—between members of His Majesty's Government on the one side, as representing the coalition, and members of His Majesty's Opposition on the other. There is no room for the outsider, however eminent and well-informed and well-intentioned he may happen to be. Such an admixture could only prove mischievous. For the very essence of the proposed arrangement is that the discussion should take place between practical men who have a thorough understanding of the business in hand from their own various points of view. If you introduce a "gallery" in the shape of even a single distinguished stranger, you at once bring in a non-practical element, which may prove a very dangerous obstacle to agreement.

And the final condition is at least as important as any of the others. The convention must be free. There should be no boggling over antecedent terms on the plea of securing some common ground. Common ground cannot be safely discovered on any such higgling principles. One party must not say to the other, "I will only confer providing you, on your part, will first subscribe to this, that, or the other general principle or particular method." The starting-point should

